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The way everlasting

# THE WAY EVERLASTING

# THE WAY EVERLASTING

Sermons

BY

JAMES DENNEY, D.D.

*Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever*

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# ELEMENTAL RELIGION.

"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me."—PSALM CXXXIX. 1.

I ONCE heard a well-known man, speaking of difficulties in the Bible, express himself between jest and earnest in this fashion: "The Gospels are a story, and a story may conceivably be untrue; the epistles are arguments, and arguments may conceivably be unsound; but the Psalms are the immediate reflection of personal experiences, and we can take them as they stand without asking any questions." Certainly that is true of the 139th Psalm, which even in the Psalter has an eminence of its own, and brings us into contact with elemental religion, with the soul's direct and overwhelming experience of God. None of us could have written it, but there is none of us in whom there is not an echo to its sublime and solemn utterance; and that echo is the spirit of God, bearing witness by and with His word in our hearts.

The Psalm has four strophes, each of six verses; and in each of the four an essential aspect or element in the soul's experience of God absorbs the mind of the writer. It will repay us if in following his thought his experience in any degree becomes ours.

1. First, he is overpowered by the experience of God's perfect knowledge of him.

We are apt to speak in this connexion of God's omniscience, but there is nothing about omniscience in

the Psalm. Omniscience is an abstract noun, and abstract nouns are unequal to the intense feeling of the passage. The important thing in religion is not the belief that God is omniscient, but the experience that God knows me, and it is on this the Psalmist dwells. It is almost implied in the connexion of his words that in the heart of the writer there was a kind of passive resistance to this experience, a resistance which God's spirit overcame, piercing and discovering all his inner life. We are slow to know ourselves, and sometimes do not wish to; purposes form in the background of our minds, of which we are hardly conscious; latent motives actuate us; perhaps our own words or deeds, in which they suddenly issue, startle us; we are amazed that we should have said or done such a thing. But it is no surprise to Him. "Thou understandest my thought afar off." Such knowledge of man by God is quite different from omniscience. Omniscience is a divine attribute, but what is here experienced is a divine action—it is God through His searching knowledge of us entering with power into our lives. It is God besetting us behind and before, and laying His hand upon us. The Psalmist does not dwell particularly on the divine motive, so to speak, in this searching of man. It might be felt as the shadowing of the soul by an enemy, or as the over-shadowing presence of a friend. The one thing on which he does dwell is its reality and its completeness. It is too wonderful for him; it baffles him when he tries to understand it; but incomprehensible as it is, it is real. He only knows himself as he is conscious of being searched and known by God.

I suppose most of us have wrestled with arguments

intended to prove the existence or the personality of God. Well, I am not going to raise any philosophical question about the powers or the incapacities of human reasoning in this matter. No religion ever took its origin in such reasoning, however it may have succeeded or been baffled in trying to justify itself at reason's bar. The being and the personality of God, so far as there is any religious interest in them, are not to be *proved* by arguments; they are to be *experienced* in the kind of experience here described. The man who can say, *O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me*, does not need any arguments to prove that God is, and that He is a person, and that He has an intimate and importunate interest in his life. If that is a real experience—as who will deny that it is?—and if it is not a morbid phenomenon, but one which is sane and normal, then the *thou* in it is just as real as the *me*. The Psalmist is as certain of God as he is of his own existence; indeed it is not too much to say that it is only as he is conscious of being searched and known by God—only as he is overwhelmed by contact with a spirit which knows him better than he knows himself—that he rises to any adequate sense of what his own being and personality mean. He is revealed to himself by God's search; he knows himself through God. Speaking practically—and in religion everything is practical—God alone can overcome atheism, and this is how He overcomes it. He does not put arguments within our reach which point to theistic conclusions; He gives us the experience which makes this Psalm intelligible, and forces us also to cry, O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. "After that ye have known God," says St. Paul to the Galatians,

"or rather"—correcting himself—"have been known by God." Yes, it is the overpowering sense that we are known through and through by another which seals upon our hearts that knowledge of God on which religion rests.

2. The second strophe of the Psalm deals with another aspect or element in the writer's experience of God. There is indeed something unreal in calling it another, for all experiences of God are interdependent. Still, it inspires the Psalmist anew; his soul, which has sunk exhausted under the thought of God's absolute knowledge of him, rallies itself to speak of God's wonderful and inevitable presence with him. And here again we should take care not to lose ourselves and the profit of this high experience by speaking of God's omnipresence. No doubt if we were constructing a doctrine of God, we should have need and room for such a term; but in religion the important thing is not the idea that God is everywhere, but the experience that wherever I am God is with me. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" Why, it may be asked, should we want to go anywhere? Why should we try to escape from God? The answer does not need to be given, because every one can give it for himself. The first man tried to hide from God, and so have all his children, but always in vain. Wilful boys try, experimenting with their new-found liberty, and God makes His presence felt through all their riot. Worldly men try, absorbed in affairs they had rather keep to themselves, renouncing church and sabbath, Bible and reflexion; but when they least expect it, a light or a shadow falls on their path, and they know that God is

there; sensual men try it in dissipation, and desperate men even in death; but there is no height nor depth nor distance nor darkness that can shut Him out of our life. As St. Augustine says, the only way to flee from God is to flee to Him. The voice which says in our hearts, Where art thou? is not meant to drive us from Him, but to make us conscious of His presence, and to urge us to turn consciously to Him. There is only one thing which can really separate us from God, and that is a secret. A secret always divides. It divides more in proportion as the relation which it annuls is close. It may divide fatally husband and wife; it divides fatally the soul and God, raising an invisible but insuperable wall between them, and keeping us far from Him even while He is intimately near to us. Do not cut yourself off from God by any unconfessed sin, by any unavowed hope, by anything that makes you restrain prayer or try to avoid His presence. It is not far to seek and to find Him. He is near to all that call upon Him in truth. To find His presence not a dread but an inspiration, He asks nothing of us but that we should walk in the light as He is in the light, and have no secrets from Him.

3. The third strophe of the Psalm, the third element in the Psalmist's experience of God, seems at the first glance to be of a different character, yet it is closely connected with what precedes. Observe how it is linked on by *for*. "For Thou hast formed my reins: Thou hast knit me together in my mother's womb." Here, it may be said, we are not dealing with immediate experience; there is an element of inference in the writer's conviction which is introduced by the *for*. God is at first, so to speak, an observer, and then a

companion; but what is implied in an observer so searching, in a companion so close and inseparable? To the mind of the Psalmist what is implied is that his very being has its ground in God, and that the whole marvel and mystery of what he is go back to Him. If it were not so, God could not have the knowledge of him or the nearness to him by which he is so deeply impressed. At first he thinks of himself as an inhabitant of the moral world, and there God is an awful observer, an inevitable presence; now he thinks of himself as a native of what we call the physical universe, only to realize that there also the presence and action of God are as pervasive as in the higher sphere. It is not exaggerating or misrepresenting him if we say that the truth to which expression is given in the third section of the Psalm is the truth that the physical and the moral worlds, as we call them, are one in God—that He whose moral sovereignty has been so deeply felt and so wonderfully described in the world of conscious life is the author of nature too—and that nature and human nature, in each individual human being, through all variations of condition and circumstance, are determined by Him and are continually in His hand. "My frame was not hidden from Thee when I was made in secret . . . in Thy book were they all written, even the days which were ordained, when as yet there was none of them." In all that we are, in the very frame and texture of our being; in all that befalls us, in the length of our life and its vicissitudes, we are absolutely dependent on God. That in a manner explains how we can have the wonderful experiences of God before described; only the author of our being could have such a close and unremitting interest in us.

There are few things more to be desired at the present moment than the power to realize this truth. Partly we have got into the habit of defining the physical and the moral worlds simply by contrast with each other, as if we had not to live at the same time in both, and as if that did not imply their ultimate unity; and partly we are accustomed to appeal to the lower against the higher. How, a man asks, can I, a creature with such a nature, face a spiritual calling? How can I ever be anything but what I am? There is no proportion between the constitution which nature has given me and the vocation with which God summons me. Or the same thing is said about circumstances. How can anyone born in the conditions in which I was, and compelled to live in the environment in which I live, be anything but the miserable creature you see? These are dangerous things to say. No one ever says them for himself with quite a good conscience, and their moral unsoundness is shown by the fact that the compassion for others which they inspire turns only too easily into contempt. Surely the Psalmist has the deep truth in his grasp when he reminds us that God is not only intimately with us in our moral life, but that He is in and behind our nature and our circumstances—that He fashioned us in the womb and that all our days were written in His book—that He commits us to no conflict in which He does not stand behind us—that no nature is so disabled, no circumstances so disabling, as to shut a man out from the care and the providence of his Maker. One of the striking things in the Psalm is the tone in which the writer speaks of this at the close of this strophe. The omniscience and omnipresence of God, as they come home to the in-

dividual conscience in the moral world, have something oppressive in them; they awe and overwhelm us; but as resting on God's creation of us, and His providential ordering of our lives, they are transfigured with tenderness; the Psalmist is not haunted by God, but abandons himself with joy to His care. "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with Thee." No doubt these words repeat in a new connexion what has been already said in the first section—"such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it"—but they contain something more. They are an echo of the touching words in the 103rd Psalm: "Like as a father pitieth his children, the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"; they are an anticipation of St. Peter's words in the New Testament—"Commit your souls to Him in well doing as to a faithful Creator." Whoever betrays us, our Creator will not. With all its disabilities and limitations, and in spite of all its corruptions, human nature is dear to its author. "I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am awfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well." It is only when we shut God out of nature—as no one can do who has had in his nature the experience out of which man cries, O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me—that we can look on it in ourselves or others with contempt or despair. For the human creature to know the faithful Creator is to know that he has not been made in vain, and to be assured that through whatever conflicts he can rise and live in a world where inspired utterances like those of this Psalm will fall upon his ear

through nature and awaken echoes in his inmost soul.

4. And now we come to the last strophe of the Psalm. I have spoken of all the others as expressing some aspect or element of religion in its simplest and deepest form—as uttering the soul's fundamental experiences of God—but can we say the same of this? or does it not carry us into another world when we read: "Oh that thou wouldest slay the wicked, God! Depart from me, therefore, ye bloodthirsty men. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee, and do not I loathe them that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred, I count them mine enemies." How, it may be asked, can a soul which has been flooded with the consciousness of God, of His intimate nearness, of His all penetrating love, how can such a soul be overcome by such a temper? Surely these are not pious prayers; but savage and inhuman, a melancholy illustration of the inconsistencies which lower human nature even at its height.

I cannot think that in a mind so great as that of the writer of this Psalm—and one might even say in a work of art so perfect—there should be an unprovoked and sudden lapse into mere inconsistency. There must be a connexion in thought between these passionate words and what precedes, and I believe it is not hard to find. The Psalmist has been dwelling on what I have called the unity of the natural and the moral worlds, the truth that God is behind both, that it is the same power which speaks in conscience, revealing man to himself, and which originates and sustains that physical being in which man lives his moral life. These are real truths and experiences, and religion

depends for its very being on the recognition of them. But it is possible to recognize them in a way which is fatal to religion. It is possible to lose in the sense of the unity of nature and the moral life as alike dependent on God the sense of the vital differences with which they confront us. It is possible to become insensible to the fact that God is not only the source of all being, but of the distinction between good and evil, and that to assert the distinction is as essential to religion as to assert the unity of God and the dependence of all things on Him. Christ, says a French writer, has two great enemies, the God Priapus and the God Pan, and the latter is the more impracticable of the two. The most dangerous enemy of religion is the mood in which all the differences in the world seem to become unreal in face of the unity of God. The difference between nature and spirit, between the personal and the impersonal, between freedom and necessity, between what we are born and what we make of ourselves, between corporate responsibility and the responsibility of the individual—the difference in the last resort of right and wrong—all these are relative, evanescent, never to be fixed; they dissolve, when we try to grasp them, in a kind of moral or non-moral haze. This is the supreme illustration of the truth that the corruption of the best is worst; for there is no better or more inspiring truth than that of the dependence of all being, natural and moral, upon God; and no error more deadly or degrading than that to God all things are alike. It is against the temptation to let the truth which he has just recognized in such moving words sink into this deadly falsehood that the soul of the Psalmist reacts with instinctive and passionate vehemence. He

knows that the world and every human being in it are absolutely dependent upon God; but he knows also that what is going on in the world is a battle, and that it is the Lord's battle, and that it is vital to be on the Lord's side. No doubt the passion with which he casts himself into the battle is less than Christian passion. He is ready to kill in the battle, and perhaps not ready to die. But in the Lord's battle the sign under which we conquer is the cross. It is not by shedding the blood of others, but by the sacrifice of our own life, that we can contribute to the Lord's victory. But where the Psalmist is right, and where we must not fall beneath his insight, is in the clear perception that the reality of religion involves conflict —that what is going on among men in the world is a battle in which the cause of God is at stake—a battle, and not a sham fight. God is not in the same sense on both sides. It is not a game of draughts in which the same hand moves the blacks and the whites. It is a matter of life and death, and the Psalmist is *in* it for life or death, with his whole heart. So must every one be who would prove what the presence of God in life means. The cross of Christ, where He died for the difference between right and wrong, and declared it to be as real as His agony and passion, teaches the same truth as the vehement Psalmist, and makes the same appeal. "Who is on the Lord's side?" it calls to us as we look out upon life. And it is only as we enlist under that ensign, and commit ourselves to fight the good fight to the last, that we can share in the experiences which inspired this wonderful Psalm.

There is something peculiarly touching in the closing lines. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try

me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." It is as if the Psalmist shrank suddenly from his own impetuosity, felt his rashness in judging others, and realized that it is easier to slay the wicked than to be inwardly separated from sin. In this humbler mood he does not shrink from God's eye, but longs for it. He feels that for God to take knowledge of him is his hope. Salvation does not come from his zeal, but from the Lord, who knows him altogether. It is exactly in the key in which the Samaritan woman speaks of Jesus: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" It is only one who knows us better than we know ourselves who can give us the life which is life indeed.

## MAN'S CLAIMS IN RELIGION, AND GOD'S RESPONSE.[1]

"Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."—I. COR. I. 22-24.

MANY men, many minds, says the proverb, and there is no department of human affairs in which it is more true than the spiritual. It is not, as it has been sceptically put, that everyone constructs his own *roman de l'infini* to suit his taste, but that men who are quite serious have their own ideas of what religion ought to be. They know what they want it to do for them, and they think they know the proper kind of evidence by which it ought to be supported. If it does not meet the conditions they prescribe, they feel at liberty to withhold their assent from it. This is not done with any sense of arrogance, but naturally and as a matter of course. If religion does not meet our needs, if it does not come supported by what we regard as the indispensable evidence, how can we have anything to do with it? It does not occur to those who think thus, that they are prescribing to God the manner in which He shall make Himself known, or giving Him notice of the only terms on which they will recognize Him. Yet this is what it amounts to. And while in all such operations of the mind man's need of God is attested, there

[1] A communion sermon.

may quite possibly be something in them which God cannot meet in the way required.

In his work as a preacher of the Gospel, Paul encountered many types of mind, and in this text he describes the two chief. "Jews claim signs, and Greeks are in quest of wisdom". The very form of the sentence shows that Jews and Greeks are to be taken, not in their nationality, but as representative of intellectual types; and it is because such types survive among ourselves that we can make a profitable application of the words.

1. *Jews claim signs.*—For them the evidence of religion was to be given in works of power. They would not believe in God unless He appealed to their senses by doing something extraordinary—something which He was not doing meanwhile. We know how constantly this demand was made upon our Lord. It was a temptation which beset Him from the very beginning of His ministry. If He had cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple He would have provided the kind of evidence for His mission that some people required. Show us a sign from Heaven, they said to Him again and again. Even in His agony they taunted Him with His inability to produce that proof that He was from God which they were entitled to claim. "If He be the King of Israel let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." The modern equivalent of all this is commoner than many people think. When Carlyle said of God, the God in whom Christians believe, "He *does* nothing," he gave expression to precisely this mental temper. It is the temper of all to whom it is a religious difficulty that there is a constitution and course of nature and of human life in

which things go on according to general laws, and in which there is much that is baffling, mysterious, and unjust. If we are to believe in God, they say, let Him do something. Let Him *signalize* His presence in the world by wonderful works of power. "We see not our signs." Let Him make bare His holy arm; let Him break the oppressor in pieces, heal the terrible diseases that fill us with fear and humiliation, interpose visibly and decisively to arrest wrong; let Him satisfy this natural and legitimate demand for an exhibition of His power, and we will believe in Him. But apparently He does not do so. As far as such signal demonstrations are concerned, all things go on as they have done since the beginning of the creation. Some people call this a trial to faith; others describe it as an objection to religion; but there it is. God does not accept the dictation of the Jew in us as to the way in which He is to make Himself known.

2. *Greeks seek after wisdom.*—As distinct from natures which crave a demonstration of power, there are those which long for nothing so much as a key to the world and to the life of man. This is what they want in religion, and they will not look at anything as religion which does not put such a key into their hands. The Greeks are a type of this class. They are the most intellectual people known to history. We owe to them all that we call philosophy and science. They believed in the mind, in its powers, its duties, its right to be sincerely dealt with and to have its legitimate demands met. Even in religion they sought intellectual satisfaction. They wanted its preachers to have excellency of speech and of wisdom. They required of religion itself to give them an intellectual

grasp of the world in which they lived, an intelligible interpretation of it; what was it good for if it did not do so, justifying the ways of God to man, solving the problems which vexed both brain and conscience, reconciling man intellectually to his environment? It hardly needs to be stated that this type of mind is common enough. It is represented more or less adequately by every one who has what are called intellectual difficulties about religion. A poet of our own day speaks about the burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world, and what many really crave in religion is such a light upon its nature and destiny as will alleviate the burden and dissipate the mystery. A religion that does not bring such a light, that does not yield a rational explanation of nature and of human life, is not for them. Perhaps the most signal illustration of this is that great estrangement from the Christian faith commonly known as Agnosticism. The Agnostic is a man who has been baffled in the Greek quest for wisdom, and has given up religion as the sphere of insoluble problems. He is a Greek, with a natural instinct for wisdom, which disappointment has paralyzed. He no longer *seeks* wisdom; he has abandoned such vain adventures; he stays at home and realizes, with such resignation as he can command, how poorly the house is furnished. God does not meet his claim, any more than that of the Jew, in the way which he prescribes. There may be a key to all mysteries, but it is not put in his hand to start with.

This apparently negative attitude of the Gospel to the claims of Jew and Greek has, I believe, misled many. The impression left on their minds is that the true religion has nothing to do with signs or with

wisdom: it reveals a God to whom miracles and philosophy are alike indifferent. He does not signalize His presence by works of power; He does not cast an interpretative light on the mystery of the world. But this is a mistake, due to breaking off in the middle of the Apostle's sentence. The demands of the Jew and of the Greek are in a sense just, and a true religion must be able to meet them. There must be power in God, and therefore in the true religion; there must be wisdom in God, and therefore the true religion must have a key to the world, a way of looking at life in which the mind can rest. These are not presumptuous but legitimate demands, and the Apostle does not repel them: the very claim he makes for his Gospel is that it meets them. It meets them indeed in a way so startling as to be at first sight almost incredible, but it does meet them. "We preach Christ crucified . . . Christ *the power* of God and *the wisdom* of God"—the very thing which Jews and Greeks required. Jews claim signs? Well, if you want to see all that God can do, the supreme demonstration of His power, look at Christ on His cross, and at what God accomplishes through Him. Greeks are in quest of wisdom? Once more, if you want to find the key to the world's perplexities, to see the very splendour of the light with which God lightens up its gloomiest and most oppressive mysteries, look at Christ on His cross. The one heart-breaking and hopeless mystery of life is sin; the one thing in presence of which it vanishes is redeeming love, the love revealed in the crucified Son of God. Man's claim upon God for a demonstration of power and wisdom is not repelled; it is fully met and satisfied—but at the cross.

No doubt it is very difficult to take this in, and it was probably more difficult for those who could distinctly envisage crucifixion and its horrors than it is for us. Crucifixion was public execution, the shameful death of the lowest criminals. The Jewish name of contempt for Jesus was "the hanged". But the repulsiveness has been felt under all circumstances, and the temptation has often come to the church to ignore or to spiritualize what the Apostle here puts into the forefront as God's answer to man's need—the real person, and the real and shameful death of Christ, recorded in the Gospels. One of the purposes served by the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate to-day, is to provide a check to such tendencies. At first sight it seems strange to find this material element, so to speak, in a spiritual religion. It is so inconsistent, apparently, with the worship of God in spirit and in truth, that some Christians like the Quakers disregard it, and many in all the churches are embarrassed by it, and even when they observe it do not know what to think of it, and could wish they did not need to think of it at all. But in any case it does this for us: it brings us back whether we will or not to the heart of the revelation on which our religion rests: Christ crucified. As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we show the Lord's death. We are withdrawn from all our prepossessions about God, from all the requirements we address to Him, from all our preconceptions as to the way in which He must or ought to act, and are set down before the reality which shows us how it has actually pleased Him to display His power and His wisdom to men. Here, however startling it may be, is the seat of God's omnipotence;

here and nowhere else is the key to all that is mysterious in life.

We must notice that the power is uniformly put first: it is of it that we first have experience, and it is only through it that we have access to the wisdom. You want an almighty God, the Apostle says. Where then can you find God exerting omnipotent power, doing what it baffles every other power in the universe to do, except here? If a child were asked to point to the signs of God's power, he might naturally think of the storm which tosses the sea and the ships; or of the earthquake which levels cities in a moment and engulfs the pride of man; or of the lightning flash which shatters trees and towers. Those who are no longer children know better than this even about the forces of nature. They know that the fiercest storm which ever swept the ocean has no power in it at all compared with the silent irresistible swell of the tide. They know that the earthquakes which appalled the world at Lisbon and Messina were insignificant forces compared with the invisible pull of the sun which holds the planets in their orbits. They know that no thunderbolt has potency in it to compare with the sunshine in which we bask on a summer morning. And they know also, if they know anything of themselves and their necessities, that God has more wonderful and difficult things to do than can be done by storm or tide, by earthquake or gravitation, by lightning or sunshine. He has to make bad men good. He has to win again those who have been alienated from him by an evil life. He has to reach their hearts through a bad conscience, and without weakening conscience, nay while vindicating all its

claims, He has to prevail with them to come to Himself. He has to overcome the distrust and fear of men, and to evoke their confidence. He has to subdue them to penitence, to faith, to devotion. He has to do this not for one, but for all; He has to reconcile the world to Himself. It needs an inconceivable power to do that—a power far more wonderful than any that could be exerted through nature, whether in mercy or in wrath. To fill men's hearts with food and gladness would not do it; to blight them with pestilence and famine would not do it. But God does it through Christ crucified. There, at the cross, he wields a power far more wonderful than any of which the Jews dreamed—a supernatural power transcending everything that could have been displayed in such signs as they claimed—an unmistakable, immeasurable, Divine power: a final guarantee of the presence of God.

Paul knew this from his experience as a preacher, and it was because he knew it he magnified his calling. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is a Divine power to save all who believe." He had seen its efficacy, when he wrote to the Corinthians, through a ministry of more than twenty years. We have entered now on the twentieth Christian century, and as we look back on that long stretch of time we can say that the supreme power in the world for good from the beginning of it till this day has been the power of Christ crucified. All reconciling, regenerating, healing influences which have blessed the world have had their seat and centre in the cross. And is it not possible for us to add our individual testimony to the great testimony borne by history? When *we* are bad—when we are selfish, angry, indolent, indulgent, un-

godly—can we keep it up in the presence of Christ crucified? Or if we are determined to keep it up, must we not shut our eyes to this great sight, or go to some place where it sinks below the horizon? To give it the opportunity of telling upon us—to expose ourselves to the power which issues from it—is to give it the victory. This is what we profess to-day as we gather round the Lord's Table. We long to be better men and women, to get dominion over our sins, to be thoroughly right with God. We long for truer penitence, for more whole-hearted, loving, devoted obedience to God. Where in all the world is the Divine power to be found which can work these miracles in us? It is to be found—this is the very meaning of the Supper—in Christ crucified. Our one hope for all this is that He may become dominant in us, establishing His ascendency in our hearts. The power of God to save, the highest and divinest power God can exercise, is the power manifested in His Passion and operating through it. The Lord reigns from the tree. This is the paradoxical but sufficient answer of God to all who ask signs. He is working wonders all the time which transcend any of which nature could be the scene; and to them, the miracles wrought by the Passion of Jesus, the final appeal lies.

Let us look now at the Gospel as God's response to those who seek wisdom: Christ crucified . . . the wisdom of God. Wisdom is always a hard word, and perhaps it is not possible for us to be sure of what precisely it meant to the Apostle. But we know in what direction to look for the meaning. We know generally that wisdom is that which enables us to recognize the end if not the plan of life—that it is that

which brings light to its mysteries, and even in our dark strivings makes us conscious of the right way.

The great mystery of life, in presence of which the others hardly count, is sin. This is the one thing which after all speculation remains opaque and impenetrable. No reason can cast the faintest gleam of real light upon it. Those who explain it as a mere negation, an unreality—those who regard it simply as an imperfection, and to be outgrown—those who tell us it is but good in the making, and that a bad conscience is the growing pains of the soul—are all alike, when the conscience listens to them, madmen. It is they who are unreal, and whose ingenuities appal by their frivolity and irrelevance the soul which is actually at grips with evil. But though no philosophy as such has ever been able to rationalize sin, though in a world created and sustained by a good God it is and remains an enigma to the mind, at the cross some light falls upon it: we see that whatever its origin, God takes the burden of it on Himself. He does not stand afar off, and decline to have anything to do with the sinful world which owes to Him its being. He *bears* its sin. He enters into the situation sin has created. He takes the pain, the shame, the death it involves, upon Himself: and in so doing He overcomes it and enables us to overcome. The only thing which goes any way to make sin intelligible—in other words, the only thing which in this connexion puts wisdom even imaginably within our reach—is redemption. It is not a new thought, or a new combination of thoughts; it is not anything which the mind could compass by its own efforts; it is a new fact; a new revelation of reality given in a mighty act of God. Here is wisdom for a

world baffled and stupefied by sin: here, in the redemption which is in Christ crucified, sin gets at last a meaning as a foil to grace, and God's love shines out with a power and splendour which but for sin we could not have conceived.

Difficult as the idea of wisdom is, there are two ideas which are always involved in it—unity and purpose; and Christ crucified appears as the wisdom of God in this respect also, that through the power which issues from Him unity and purpose are brought into our lives. Many people are conscious that their life has neither; it is fragmentary and aimless; they do one thing and then another, but they have no dominant motive, no chief end. Life is a thing of shreds and patches, dissipated in a hundred inconsistent directions: there is no wisdom in it, no worthy end, method, or plan. They will never be happy, they will never feel that they have found the key to life, nay they never will find it, till something enters into their being which enables them to say: This one thing I do. And this they will never say till their life comes under the power of Christ crucified. The life consummated in that death is great enough, comprehensive enough, commanding enough, to gather our little lives into its vast eternal sweep, and to bear them on to God. It has absolute unity, absolute certainty of itself and of its goal, absolute consistency and worth. When Christ crucified subdues and impels us—when we can say with the Apostle, I live no longer but Christ liveth in me—we are delivered from inconsistency, futility, and folly, and made wise with the wisdom of God.

Under the guidance of the Apostle we may take

one step further, and try to look not at the blackness of sin, nor at the perplexed individual life, but at the whole world of nature in the light cast by the cross. We are quite familiar with the interpretation of nature which is given by science, and in which everything is explained by reference to antecedent conditions. In the nature of things such explanation is endless. Science can never answer all its own questions, and even if it had done so a further question remains, the only question the answer to which raises us from the world of science into that of wisdom: What is all this world of nature for? We are overwhelmed by its vastness—its boundless spaces, its immeasurable duration, its inexhaustible life: is there any key to it? Has it any unity or purpose? is there any intelligible law which pervades it all and directs it to one end? Paul is bold enough, and I admit it is the utmost reach of boldness of which the human mind is capable, to answer all these questions in the affirmative, and to say that he knows the supreme law of the world, and that he has found it at the cross. What is revealed there is redeeming love, and it is revealed as the last reality in the universe, the eternal truth of what God is. It is before the foundation of the world; nay the very foundations of the world are laid in it. Christ is the key to creation; nature is constituted to be the Redeemer's kingdom. This is not science, but wisdom —this conviction that in Him were all things created, and that all things therefore work together for good to them that love Him; this assurance that things visible and invisible, things past and to come, all times and spaces and all that fill them, are the destined inheritance of the crucified Christ.

If anyone is disposed to repel all this in words like the Psalmist's—such knowledge is too strange for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it—I admit it is not easy. But the simple fact about Christ crucified is that when He enters into our life it is to fill all things. He will be everything or nothing. It is His destiny to have all things put under His feet, and it is our only wisdom to look at all things in this light. Think what it means to say: We preach Christ crucified. Here, in this place, at this hour, he is held up on His cross, the Son of God, bearing the sin of the world. You wish to know the final truth about God? Here it is, eternal love, bearing sin. Can you think of a power so wonderful as that which bears the sin of the whole world? a power so able to regenerate you, and to put the key of life, and of all the mysteries with which it confronts you, into your hand? Can you want anything better to trust, anything worthier to inspire, anything abler to throw upon all the dark places of life the light of hope and joy? There is not anything. It is here or nowhere we must learn what the power and wisdom of God mean; and whatever we may have been seeking or expecting or claiming, it is here, in the presence of Christ crucified, that the voice of God comes to us at last: "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: I am God, and there is none else."

## KNOWLEDGE, NOT MYSTERY, THE BASIS OF RELIGION.

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."—DEUT. XXIX. 29.

THE secret things spoken of in this verse are in the first instance the destiny of the Jewish people. After the law has been proclaimed, the lawgiver enlarges upon the consequences of obedience and disobedience; he pronounces blessings on those who keep it, and curses on those who disregard it; in particular, he threatens the most terrible judgments upon the moral scepticism which laughs at the promise or the menace of God, and confidently takes its own way as though God had never spoken or would not keep His word. He declares frankly that we do not know how or when the promises or threatenings will take effect: that is the secret thing which belongs to God alone; but the nation is under law to God nevertheless, a law which is perfectly well known; and it is this which determines its duty. Ignorant as men are of the course of providence, of the means which God will employ to react against rebellion and crush it, of the quarter of the sky in which the thunder clouds of His judgment will accumulate; ignorant as they are also of a thousand things which at once solicit and baffle the mind, and by doing so seem to disable it for action,

there is one thing of which they are not ignorant—the law of God. This has been revealed to us and to our children *for ever*. It is an unchanging and infallible guide through worlds and ages yet unborn. And it is given to us that we may do it.

The fortune or the destiny of nations is always an interesting subject for speculation. The story of the rise and fall of powers like Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, Carthage, Rome, Venice, fascinates the historian and the moralist; even for the thoughtless it is a magnificent picture, and for the wise it is a revelation. It verifies the word of God which speaks to us in this chapter; it shows us in a thousand ways that vice is the worm at the root of a nation's strength, and that righteousness alone makes nations great. Often we meet with speculations on the future of our own country or of its contemporaries and rivals. We are invited to see a greater Britain grow continually greater, until a federation of English-speaking peoples controls the affairs of the world, with a pleasing consciousness of having only obtained their due; or to see the worn-out British race, stripped of its ships, its colonies and its commerce, sinking to an inglorious end. These speculations are precisely what is meant here when we read, the secret things belong unto the Lord our God: as far as we are concerned, the book of the future is sealed with seven seals. But our duty is not affected by that. Though we cannot tell the fortunes of the nation beforehand, we can tell on what they depend. We know that obedience to the law of God has the promise of the future. We know that industry, sobriety, justice, charity, are the strength of the community; we know that pride, fullness of bread,

and abundance of idleness, are its death. We know that no nation can prosper in drunkenness and uncleanness, in luxury and insolence, in the deification of might and the contempt of right; and this knowledge is given for our guidance. It never goes out of fashion. It is as true now as in the days of Moses—as true in Britain as in Israel—as true in the capitals of modern commerce as in Carthage or in Venice—as true of nations as of individuals, that only those who do the will of God abide for ever.

It is permissible to generalize this truth, and to point the applications of it which are pertinent to ourselves. Religion, it means, does not depend on the things we are ignorant of, but on the things we know. Its basis is revelation, not mystery; and it is not affected by the fact that mysteries abound. Little as we know, and much as we are ignorant of, our responsibility for what we know is unqualified. I do not think it is possible to overstate either the dimensions of our ignorance, or the urgency of our responsibility for acting up to what we know. There is always a temptation to let the first of these depress our interest in the second; ignorance—sometimes erected into a principle and designated Agnosticism—falls like a heavy frost on morality and religion. It takes the pith and virtue out of them. Now what Scripture here teaches is that this is wrong. The most perplexed and baffled man, the man who has most certainly come to the limit of his insight and who is most appalled by the opaqueness of the future, knows something; and it is on his action in view of that knowledge that his relation to God depends. He is not to be tested by what he does not understand in the infinite scheme of the universe, but by how he faces the responsibility imposed

on him by what he knows. A few illustrations will make plain what this means.

Many of us are interested not only in our country, but in the Church, and much as we should like to see into the future must acknowledge that it is very impenetrable. How long can the Churches go on upon the present footing, and in their present relations to each other? What prospect is there of closer relations between them? Do such closer relations depend in any degree on all Christians being gathered into one organization, or may they come to pass through the discovery that modes of organization are matters of comparative indifference, and that Christians may be thoroughly one, in the only sense in which Christ is interested in their unity, though they are organized in many different and independent ways? Are the masses of the population which are at present outside all the Churches going to be brought within the existing organizations, or will the Gospel perhaps take root among them in ways unexampled hitherto, developing new types of thought, of organization, and of moral effort? Will Christ establish His ascendancy upon the earth in ways no one has dreamt of? Will the words He spoke of the temple at Jerusalem—"There shall not be left one stone upon another"—be spoken of our Churches? or what will their future be? These are simply questions which we cannot answer. They are like the question the disciples put to Jesus after the Resurrection: "Lord, dost Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The answers belong to the things which the Father has kept in His own power. But our ignorance does not in the least affect our duty, and when such questions rise in our minds, we have only to recall how Jesus answered the disciples: "Ye

shall be witnesses unto Me". Even if the future were revealed to us beforehand it would not be intelligible: it is only as we grow up to things and live through them that they enter into our minds. I once heard a missionary say, "I don't know how India is to be evangelized, but I know we are evangelizing it"; and we must say something similar of our own country. We cannot predict and cannot effectually plan the future of the Christian societies in Britain; but if we use them to penetrate life with testimony to Jesus, we may be sure they will not fail, and that no future will leave the soul without a home.

Cognate to this is a question which has also exercised many minds and has had serious practical consequences —the question of the future of those who die without having heard the Gospel. It was once believed in the Church that the heathen who die in their heathen state perish everlastingly, without exception and without hope. Every time the clock ticks, it was said, a soul passes out of time into eternity, and all over heathendom that means passes from earth to hell. Every twenty-four hours from eighty to a hundred thousand souls die this awful death. This belief was regarded if not as the only, yet as the most urgent and imperative motive of missions; it was under the constraint of it that missions were first organized in modern times, and it was assumed as an unquestionable piece of Christian faith. No one, we are well aware, would give it this place any longer. What the future of the heathen is, and how it is related to their present, we simply cannot tell. The curtain that falls at death is as impenetrable for us as it was for the first man, and we cannot see past it a single inch. But our duty to the heathen does not depend upon what we do not know, but upon what we

do; and that is clear enough to supply all the motives for missions that we need. We know the life that human beings lead where the name of Jesus is unknown: its darkness, poverty, degradation, despair. We know what our own life would be if everything were taken out of it which it owes to Him—all our Christian convictions, our Christian hopes, our Christian ideals, affections, and energies. We know how much Christ could be to the heathen, and experience has taught us how much they could be to Him. We know what treasures of devotion, of faith and love and obedience, he has already found in the hearts of men of all races—black and red and yellow as well as white. We know that God will have all men to be saved. We know that it is our Lord's will that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. We know what the dictate of love is. We are debtors to all our brethren of mankind; we owe them the Gospel. And whatever it may mean to them in the future not to have heard it while they lived —a question to which we can give no answer whatever —it is certainly a grave sin in us if we have it and keep it to ourselves. We have every motive to missions in what we know, and as against this our ignorance does not count at all.

To pass to a somewhat different illustration, many people are exercised about the future of their children more than about anything else that God has kept to Himself. They would like to know how their sons will bear themselves in the battle of life, and especially how they will face its temptations. Will they pass victorious where their fathers stumbled and fell? or will their fathers be humbled and horrified to see their old sins looking out on them from the eyes of

their sons? What kind of settlement will their daughters have in the days to come? Will they marry, and happily? or will it be necessary to make them independent of any resources but their own? If only we knew what to provide against! Of all these things we neither know nor can know anything: the future is wholly in the hand of God. But we do know what is the will of God both for ourselves and for those who come after us; and it is what we know that fixes our duty. Above all other books in the Bible, Deuteronomy is the book of religious education and of the promises attached to it. "These words which I command thee this day shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." No duty could be enforced more urgently, and in our blank ignorance of the future there is none upon which so much depends. If we want to have any insurance against its painful possibilities, it is here we must find it. What God requires of parents is not a provision for the future of their children which enables them to defy Providence, but such a training of their children in the knowledge of God and in obedience to Him as will make them secure of God's friendship. It is a training *to do all the words of this law*, and where it has been effectively given the future may be safely left with God.

Apart from these particular cases, in which ignorance of the future does not affect our present duty, there is ignorance of a more fundamental kind which has sometimes perplexed men in their religious life,

and sometimes even had fatal consequences. I mean the kind of ignorance in which we are not only without knowledge, but are oppressed with the idea of mystery; as though we were in contact with something which was not simply unknown, but never could come within the sphere of knowledge. I will give two illustrations on this point.

The text which we are considering is quoted in the Westminster Confession in connexion with what it calls the "high mystery of predestination"—the doctrine that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass"; or in its particular application to responsible creatures, that "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death". The time has been, we know, when these tremendous assertions exercised a powerful influence over many minds; there was something in them which overawed and humbled perhaps, but which as certainly shocked and paralyzed the spirits of men. For better or worse that time has passed. We have sailed into latitudes where such statements have lost their authority: in the form just cited no one is perturbed by them any more. But the facts and the motives which originally inspired them have not vanished from the world, and the trouble which they once produced still vexes souls which do not see that under another guise it is still the same. Here are two men living side by side, sons of the same parents, running to all appearance the same course: one is arrested by the Gospel, the other is not. The one who is arrested has no

doubt how it happened. *God* arrested him. Christ stretched out His strong hand and apprehended him. It is the sovereign will of God the Redeemer which is manifested in his salvation. "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us," he says, "but unto Thy name be the glory." No question of duty or responsibility seems to be raised at all: there is no apparent actor in the case but God. But what of the man who is still leading the old life, and who has had no such experience? Is he at liberty to say: Till God saves me as He has saved my brother, I have no responsibility in this region? No. He knows nothing of how or why God acted as He has done in his brother's case, and therefore the motives of religion cannot lie there for him. The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; it is in the things that are revealed, in the realities which are patent to our minds, that all religious motives lie. Is it possible, then, for such a man to trace back the difference between himself and his brother to an original difference of constitution, to a distinction in nature, the responsibility for which belongs in such wise to God that no responsibility in connexion with it can ever be attached to him? No: this is not possible either. No doubt the immense original differences between men, which determine so much in their life, are important; no doubt *some* will of God is revealed in them, *some* Divine purpose; but just because it is a will and a purpose that are so far hidden from us, our responsibility in religion cannot be affected by it. Our religious responsibility depends on the revealed will of God: it depends simply and solely on what we know. We know that eternal life has come into the world in Christ. We know that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. If

we may say so reverently, it is a high mystery to Him, a thing He cannot understand, that men should refuse His salvation: "Turn ye, turn ye, for why *will* ye die?" We know that the scope of the Gospel is not a matter for speculation but for action, and that the answer to the question, Are there few that be saved? is: Strive to enter in by the strait gate. We know that no one here dare stand up and say: God has never spoken to me, never laid His hand on me, never called me to Himself by the voice of Jesus. He has. And against this knowledge and experience, no ignorance however profound, no mystery however impenetrable, weighs for a single instant.

The other illustration is in substance very close to this one, but is worth stating separately. It is concerned with the mystery arising out of the complex nature of man which seems open always to inconsistent interpretations. We have only one experience, yet we can read it in ways which seem directly to contradict each other. We can read it, so to speak, from the outside, through the body. Then everything in it appears subject to a law of necessity, and responsibility is shut out. Every change in the body, including the brain, is dependent on antecedent changes, and these again on others, all being bound in an endless chain of adamantine links. Yet on these changes, which are entirely beyond our control, depends all our inner life—our thoughts, our emotions, our affections, our pieties, our impieties, our prayers, our blasphemies; they are what they are, and that they should be anything else is inconceivable. But we can read that self-same experience again from the inner side—not through the body, but through the soul—and then everything is changed. There

is no necessity now, no compulsion which has simply to be recognized, or rather which is so all-encompassing that it is not felt; everything is free, spontaneous, responsible, charged throughout with the character and value of personality. How are these opposites to be brought together? How is experience, which is undoubtedly one, to be seen in its unity, and rescued from this incoherence which is so paralyzing to the will? Here is a mystery over which the mind has brooded since thinking began. It is put in all sorts of ways. It is the problem of the unity yet distinction of soul and body, of spirit and nature, of freedom and necessity, of religion and science, of God and the universe; all these are different ways of naming the same thing. Perhaps, after all, it is too much to consider this a high mystery with power in it to suspend life and arrest responsibility. Perhaps it is not a mystery, but a conundrum. Perhaps the mind will some day expand a little and outreach it. Perhaps some mental readjustment, or some change of our point of view, may give us a stereoscopic look at life in which the two aspects shall coalesce into one clearer and more complete. We cannot tell. But one thing we are sure of: it is not by the baffling problems and unsolved mysteries of life that our conduct is to be determined; it is to be determined by what we know. We cannot make our inability to answer the questions just referred to a plea for disowning the responsibilities of life altogether. We cannot make them a plea for renouncing liberty, and consenting to exist as if nature and its necessities were all. We cannot do this, because our responsibilities are fixed by what we know, and to put it simply, we know better. We know that man is made

not to be lost in nature but to rise above it—not to be a part of the physical universe, but to be its sovereign —not to live the life of rocks and stones and trees and dumb creatures, but even while rooted in nature to live a life eternal and Divine. It is as we accept this responsibility in the sight of God that God is on our side. It is as we assert our liberty at all costs, and only so, that we enter into life.

The general import of the text is summed up if we say that, like so much else in Scripture, it is a lesson on the simplicity of real religion. It has a place for Agnosticism, doubtless; so far from being a rival to religion, Agnosticism is an element in it. "Canst *thou* by searching find out *God?* Canst *thou* find out the *Almighty* unto perfection?" Such is the noble scorn with which it meets the man whose creed is only too complete. But though it has room for Agnosticism, it rests on what we know. Its basis is not the secret things, but the things which are revealed. It is as plain as the will of God—as the Ten Commandments, as the builders on the rock and the sand, as the example of Jesus, as the appeal of His love. The difficulties which arise out of our ignorance, no matter how far-reaching they may be, are not in the proper sense religious difficulties. They are often called so, but it is a mistake. They may be theological, or scientific, or philosophical difficulties; but they are not religious, for religion rests simply on what we know. There is only one real religious difficulty, the difficulty of being religious; just as there is only one real difficulty about the word of God, the difficulty of keeping it. To see this does not make religion in itself easier, but it keeps us from fretting our strength away on obstacles which are not on our path at all.

## THE EXILE'S PRAYER.

"I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me."
—PSALM CXIX. 19.

THE text expresses with great simplicity man's position in the world, and the prayer which rises in his heart as the position is realized. He is a stranger here, a resident alien in a land which is not his home; and when he feels the strangeness of the place, he feels at the same time the need of God's guidance if he is to pass through it with safety and honour. "I am a sojourner in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me."

This is not, indeed, our first thought when our minds begin to open upon life, nor is it meant to be. The earth is kind to us at first. Love makes ready for us before we are born; we open our eyes upon faces that look on us with passionate fondness, and draw our breath in an atmosphere of love. God makes us dwell in families, and as long as the family is to all intents and purposes our world, the sense of strangeness or homelessness cannot overcome us. The years during which we are too weak to bear this sore trial are mercifully shielded from it, and if the hearts of very young children are sometimes pierced with the sense of loneliness and neglect, as though home had quite ceased to be homely, this is due to the

fault of others and not to the purpose of God. The same holds true, more or less, of the whole period of our growth. It is part of our very nature to grow up into membership of a society, into citizenship of a country. We connect our individual life with what stretches behind us into the past, and with what lies around us in the present. We naturalize ourselves, so to speak, in the earth. If our individual life is but a moment in time, we give it duration and dignity by connecting it with its roots in the past, and by serving ourselves heirs to the great inheritance which our race has accumulated; if it shrinks into a point in space, we think of the innumerable ties which bind it to others, of the innumerable lines along which influences enter it from, or pass from it to, the universal life of humanity; we try in imagination and in reality not to be strangers in the earth, but to make the world a spacious, rich, and satisfying home.

It is impossible to doubt that this is God's will. It is He who has given man the earth to dwell in. It is He who has made nature and man's mind on the same model, so that we can understand our dwelling place. It is He who has established the laws of nature, apart from which a reasonable and ordered life would be impossible, and home an idea which could never rise upon the mind. It is He who has created the parental instincts out of which the family and the home have grown in which we are received at birth. It is His government which supports and is reflected in the great communities in which the moral life of man finds all but its highest expression. And He who has created and who sustains this manifold order as plainly designs that we should live in it and enjoy it. He designs us,

as far as the order of nature and the harmony of society permit, to be at home in the world. The vast wealth of nature, and the fitness of the social organism to nourish, to exhilarate, and to gladden all the spiritual faculties of man, are of God. He who cuts himself off from these, who does not know how God has prepared in nature and in society a place for the mind and heart of man to dwell in, may *say* that he is a stranger in the earth, but it is a vain saying on such lips. He does not know whether he is a stranger or not; he has not tried whether earth may not be a home.

But there are those who have tried, and strange to say, the more complete the experiment, the less satisfying it proves. The more life is found to contain, the more the desires or rather the necessities of the soul expand. Somehow or other, light breaks in upon a good man from above. Let him use to the full and enjoy without stint the wealth of nature and the wealth of society—let him live in the light of science and in the glow of virtue and of love—let him naturalize himself and strike root on earth as thoroughly as he will: and in the very hour of his tranquillity, disquieting thoughts will come. Deeper than everything is the feeling of dependence, not on nature or society, but on God—the sense of the infinite, of the transitoriness of all that lies around, of the Divine kinship and immortality of the soul. When this wakes up in its strength, man cannot but feel, This is not my rest. The world is a rich and nobly furnished abode; human society, as it is organized here, is a defence, an inspiration, a delight, for which no words could be too strong; but neither the one nor the other, nor both together, represent that for which man was made. The soul

must have other relations, other guidance, other joys; it is a stranger in the earth.

The word "stranger" or "sojourner" is properly speaking a political one; it signifies a resident alien, a person living in a country to which he does not belong, and excluded therefore from the rights of citizenship in it. Such exclusion does not prejudice the fact that the resident alien may in his native country be a person of great account; the citizenship of those among whom he lives an exile may be one which he would scorn to compare with his own. It is, in point of fact, in this sense that a man of God like the Psalmist finds himself a stranger in the earth; and that the New Testament, which speaks of our citizenship as in heaven, describes Christians as strangers and sojourners. The Psalms describe elsewhere the life of those who are not strangers here, but have their home and all their hopes on earth, and are unvisited by thoughts of anything beyond. "Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names." It is this life, of the earth earthy, which makes the Psalmist feel from home. He cannot naturalize himself in it. As he sees its prevalence all around him, he can only say with a certain shrinking: "I am a stranger on the earth". Those who sympathize with his feeling of loneliness or homelessness will appreciate his prayer: "Hide not Thy commandments from me".

Let us consider what this means. It implies that there is a Divine law for this peculiar situation. The man of God is not to suppress that sense of being a stranger, and to conform to the world's ways. He is

not to try to smother the intimations which remind him that he is made for more than the world yields, and to do at Rome as the Romans do. No doubt the best men are the most tolerant, and can most easily give the world's conventions a conventional respect. Some time ago I saw a description of the character of a saint which is perhaps worth quoting in this connexion. "The saint," said the writer, the late Mr. Coventry Patmore, "has no fads; and you may live in the same house with him and never find out that he is not a sinner like yourself, unless you rely on negative proofs, or obtrude lax ideas on him, and so provoke him to silence. He may impress you indeed by his harmlessness and imperturbable good temper, and probably by some lack of appreciation of modern humour, and ignorance of some things which men are expected to know, and by never seeming to have much use for his time when it can be of any service to you; but on the whole he will give you an agreeable impression of general inferiority to yourself." Certainly it was no New Testament saint who stood or sat for this portrait; nothing could be less like Paul or John. But it has this much truth in it: The man who is a stranger in the earth and who knows it, though he does not distinguish himself by loud rebellion against the ways of the land he lives in, lives nevertheless a life of his own, inspired by higher laws, and knows without violence how to maintain his independence.

The law of this higher life, according to the Psalmist, is to be found in the commandments of God: whoever knows them knows what will bring order, peace, and stability into his existence, and turn his place of exile into a home in which he dwells with God. The

heart, conscious that it is an alien in this passing world, cries out for contact with the eternal to which it is akin. It longs to know God, to see God, to be right with God, to live in union and communion with Him; it longs as a citizen of heaven to obey the heavenly laws, even while a resident alien on the earth. Browning in one of his best-known poems has illustrated this with great force. He shows us the man whom Jesus had raised from the dead,

> in knowledge
> Increased beyond the earthly faculty—
> Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
> Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:

and what is the result?

> He holds on firmly to some thread of life
> (It is the life to live perforcedly)
> Which runs across some vast distracting orb
> Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
> Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
> The spiritual life around the earthly life:
> The law of that is known to him as this,
> His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.

To imagine a man who has passed within the veil, and seen the things that are eternal, and after that returned again to earth, is the most striking way of presenting one who must feel himself a stranger in the earth, and bound to live by another law; but it is not the only way. Every man in whom the sense of the infinite has awakened knows what is meant by "the spiritual life around the earthly life," and longs to hold the thread of that higher life in this land of exile; every such man longs in this alien world to live under the law, the inspiration, the memory, and the hope of God.

The Psalmist's prayer: "Hide not Thy commandments from me," gives a peculiar turn to this truth. It shows us that the contact with the element for which our hearts cry out, the hold upon the thread of life which is a matter of death or life to us, is granted in the shape of obedience to the revealed will of God. We know God when we know what God would have us do, and the Psalmist had been taught of God when he prayed, "Hide not Thy *commandments* from me". The knowledge of God that we need is a knowledge for action and obedience. Earth is a place of exile when we do no more than think of God, but the Divine life is to be introduced into the earth by the keeping of God's commandments, and even in exile we are to be loyal to our heavenly citizenship. All nature, including human nature, is to be made the organ and the revelation of God. The flesh with its instincts is to be spiritualized. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. The commandments of God are to be obeyed in them. It is as we work at this task—as we do the commandments of God—that the sense of insecurity and unreality passes away. If earth does not become our home, at all events God is our home even while we are on earth. As St. John says: "The world passes away, and the longing it inspires; but he who does the will of God abides for ever".

A far truer and more striking example than Lazarus, of the stranger on earth who longs for God's commandments, is Jesus Himself. He is the great inhabitant of another world who passed a life of exile here, and though He incorporated Himself in the human race and naturalized Himself on earth, it must always have re-

mained a strange place to Him. He says expressly that it was so. "Ye are from beneath, I am from above"; it is as much as if He had said: We belong to different worlds. If this is your home, it cannot be Mine; you may do your own will, but I am bound to do the commandments of God. A prophecy in Isaiah represents God as opening the ear of His Servant morning by morning, giving Him as every new day came the heavenly revelation He needed. Other words in the prophecy are directly applied to Jesus, and we know that this is applicable too. How often He withdrew into solitude, as one who felt that the influence of earth tended only to make life aimless, and spent hours with the Father, nourishing His exiled life with the life eternal. We know that the Psalms were familiar to Him and were used in His prayers even on the cross, and it does not seem to me fanciful to think of Him using this prayer: "I am a stranger in the earth, hide not Thy commandments from me". He tells us the secret of His life: does it not imply that He presented this prayer and had it answered daily? "I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father hath taught Me I speak these things." "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth." "If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." The Divine law which was essential to His life in union with the Father was perpetually revealed to Him: and even in this place of exile, as He did always the things which pleased Him, he could say: "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me".

Religion, when it is reduced to its simplest elements, is the same in all ages. Christ and his Apostles used

the Psalms in their devotions, we ourselves use them, and they will be used till the end of time. As years pass, and the certainty that this is not our home becomes more importunate, do we feel more than we once did the need of the presence and direction of God? It is not in us who walk to direct our own steps in this foreign land. Many of you must be familiar with them, but I will venture to quote again the well-known words of the greatest of Greek philosophers under which the very same need of God beats as we find here in the Psalmist, and in our own hearts. He is speaking particularly of the end of life and of what comes after, but his words have a wider application. "A man," he says, "should persevere until he has achieved one of two things. Either he should discover or be taught the truth; or, if that is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him." This craving for some word of God: what is it but the Psalmist's prayer, "Hide not Thy commandments from me"? Do we feel, as life becomes more obviously a pilgrimage, and earth an alien land, that our deepest need is to be sure of God, and that the way in which such security is granted is the way of obedience to a Divine law?

There are one or two practical considerations with which I shall conclude: if we take them seriously, they will help us to attain to that certainty of God which we need.

The first is this: our situation, as strangers on the earth, requires us to seek communication with God.

It demands and necessitates prayer. When it is realized and weighs upon us, it inspires prayer. The presupposition of all prayer is that there is such a thing as a will of God applicable to my situation, a Divine commandment bearing on the very circumstances in which I have to act, and by obeying which my exiled uncertain life is united to the eternal life of God. Prayer is not always the presenting of defined requests to God: we may not know what we need or even what we want—except that it is God. Prayer may be the effort of the soul, oppressed by the sense of its isolation, its impotence, or its exile in the world, to connect itself again effectively with Him. It is not an attempt to lay down the law to God; it is the longing of the soul to be sure of the law which He has laid down for it. And this particular kind of prayer, in which the soul, conscious of its darkness, its weakness, its incapacity to face life alone, cries to God in the pathetic appealing tone of this text, has a peculiar promise connected with it in Scripture. "Call unto Me and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and hidden things that thou knowest not." This is what we need—to have the Divine law, which eludes us, made plain for our actual situation. It may be made plain to us, as to Jeremiah, to whom this promise was given, in marvels of providential wisdom and goodness, in great and hidden things that we know not: but it is in any case made plain in answer to prayer.

A second consideration is this: our situation, as strangers on the earth, requires us to think about the law of God. We pray: "Hide not Thy commandments"; but in great part they are not hidden. God has spoken, and shown us the path of life. The prayer

of the text is in effect very much that of the preceding verse in the Psalm: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law". I am not speaking at random when I say that even in the Christian Church and in Christian homes there is an extraordinary lack of appreciation for the Bible as a means of initiation into the wisdom of God, and of true union and communion with Him. We do not need to raise any critical questions to be assured that if a revelation of God's will is given anywhere it is given here. If a man will only read his Bible for the sake of God's commandments, he will never encounter any difficulty in it but the difficulty of keeping them. To bring the mind, the conscience, the heart, into harmony with the mind of God, so that even in a world which largely ignores God a man may be able to live in practical union with Him, the habitual use of the Bible is indispensable. Let us read it more steadily than we have done, with more reflection, with more purpose. Let us think out, as best we can, its bearing on our life and calling. Let us come regularly to the church, where the word of God is ministered, and at least an effort is made to read its lessons for our conduct. Let us commend the word of God and the ministry of the word, at least by our example. The more we are in earnest to lead a life in which we shall have the assurance of God's presence, and in which the exile of earth shall not deprive us of our home in Him, the more we shall prize this revelation of His will, and the less shall we allow trivial causes to keep us away when the ministry of the word is within our reach.

Finally, our situation as strangers in the earth calls

us to the imitation of Jesus. As we are, so was He in the world ; and as He was, so ought we to be in it. In His case, as I have said, the Psalmist's prayer was answered. He was a stranger in the earth from whom God did not hide His commandments. He is the pattern, the captain, the head of all who are exiles here, and whose home is in God. When we look to Him, we see what this prayer really means; and the answer is given to it when His voice comes to us: "Follow Me." Follow Me—that is the sum of all God's commandments. What it means is not revealed in an instant, it is only revealed as we follow. But as we do so, beginning where we stand with the minutest act of obedience, the great revelation incarnate in Jesus begins to open up to us; we discover that in Him there shines not a casual ray of Divine light, but the very brightness of the Father's glory ; that God Himself has come to dwell with man, and that earth is a place of exile no more. Let us set our hearts to follow Jesus, steadfastly, soberly, joyfully. It is our supreme duty, because it answers to God's supreme grace. All our prayers are transcended by the experiences it opens to us. What is the exile of earth any more to those who can say: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and of His fulness we all received"?

# THE HAPPINESS OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA[1]

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—MATT. XIII. 16f.

Two things are conspicuous in this passage. First, there is the congratulation addressed by Jesus to His disciples: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see"; and next, there is the compassion with which Jesus looks back on those who had longed for such happiness and been denied it: "Many prophets and kings and righteous men have desired to see the things which ye see and have not seen them". It is of this congratulation and this compassion I wish to speak.

1. Most of us have heard panegyrics pronounced upon our own age, as compared with earlier ages in the world's history, though perhaps they are neither so common nor so confident as they were a generation ago. Happy, we have heard it said, are those who live in an age in which science has so far mastered nature and put its forces at man's disposal; happy are those who are born to political freedom, to citizenship in a great nation, with inspiring memories, responsibilities, and hopes; happy are those who have not

[1] Preached at the ordination of a missionary.

the rudest of the world's work to do, but inherit conditions in which leisure is possible, and the enjoyment of literature, art, and refined social intercourse; happy, in short, are we, living in Scotland in the twentieth century, the heirs of all the ages. There is no century behind to which we should willingly return.

It is quite right to be appreciative of such blessings, but it is not on things like these that Jesus congratulates His disciples. They had none of our modern improvements; no steam engine, or telegraph or telephone; they had no self-government, no votes, no economic security; they had not even words in their language for science or art; they had never seen any of the things which are spread before our eyes in the great exhibitions in which our age parades the consciousness of its immense superiority to all that have gone before. Yet Jesus says to them: "Blessed are the eyes that see the things which ye see". What was in His mind when He broke into this benediction? What was it the disciples saw on which they were so much to be congratulated?

The answer is plain from the very form of the sentence. Jesus does not say, "Blessed are *our* eyes for they see," as if the ground of congratulation were something in the circumstances of the time common to Him and His disciples. On the contrary, He says: "Blessed are *your* eyes for they see, and *your* ears, for they hear"; and it is abundantly clear from the context both in Matthew and Luke that the real ground of His felicitation was that the disciples lived in the age in which He had made His appearance in the world. What their eyes saw, they saw in Him; what their ears heard, they heard from His lips; and it was

something so wonderful and priceless that that generation might well have been the envy of all that went before. One of the things that come upon us with a perpetually new astonishment in the Gospels is the way in which Jesus thinks and speaks of Himself. He was meek and lowly of heart, the one perfect pattern of humility, utterly remote from boasting; but again and again He reveals, we might almost say unconsciously or unintentionally, a sense of what He is which fills us with amazement. This is one of the most striking passages in which this is done. Jesus does not assert anything here, nor make any particular claim; He only makes us feel that in His own mind He was one whose coming would have satisfied all the unfulfilled yearnings of the best of men in the past, one whose presence in the world entitled His own generation to congratulate itself above all its predecessors. It is far more wonderful than any title, and far more impressive, to feel—as these words make us feel—that in the mind of Jesus the world's felicity was at heart dependent on Him.

Is it possible for us to put the meaning of this more precisely? If what the eyes of the disciples saw and their ears heard were reduced to a unity, what would it be? Their eyes and ears were the recipients of a revelation: can we put the revelation into a word? If we look at the connexion in which this word of Jesus is given in Luke, I think we are justified in so doing. As the disciples looked on Jesus, and saw all that He did—as they listened to Him, and heard the words of grace and truth, of mercy and judgment, that proceeded out of His mouth—the conviction gradually took form within them that this was the Son of the

Father. They felt that nothing ever came between Him and God, and that nothing need ever come between Him and themselves. He was as Divine as the Father, and as human as they. He was the Son who was all the time in the bosom of the Father, and who all the time also trod the earth which they trod, breathed the air which they breathed, shared the poverty which was their lot, went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil—He was the Son in whom the Father was revealed in a redeeming love and power to which there was no limit. This was what they came to feel and believe about Jesus, and the congratulation or beatitude of this passage shows us that this is how Jesus felt about Himself. He did not say what I have said in so many words: it would not have been of any use. We cannot learn the truth about Him by being told it in set terms: it has to be revealed to us as we look on Him and listen to Him; it has to be discovered by us as the revelation takes possession of our souls. But when it *is* discovered—when we see and hear in Jesus what the Apostles saw and heard—when the whole manifestation of this wonderful Person is unified and focused in the Son of the Father, the Son in whom the Father Himself is revealed to our faith—then the truth of the beatitude appears. Happy, O thrice and four times happy, are those whose eyes see and whose ears hear the revelation of God in Jesus! This is what the best of earlier days have longed for. This is the one ground of self-congratulation that lies too deep for any trouble to touch. And I say again how wonderful it is, what a solemn awe falls upon our hearts as we think of it, that this is not only how the

Apostles thought of Jesus, but is how Jesus thought of Himself.

Many are asking at the present moment whether the revelation which the Apostles enjoyed, and on which Jesus congratulated them, is still accessible to men. Can our eyes see or our ears hear what they saw and heard? Or are we not rather to be condoled with than congratulated because our knowledge of Jesus is necessarily so remote, slight, and uncertain? Can we truly say that we know much or anything at all about Him? I am reluctant to refer in the church to questions that have so much unreality and confusion in them, but perhaps something should be said. It is quite true that there are many things about Jesus which we do not know and never can know. We do not know exactly when He was born or died; we do not know anything of at least thirty years of His life; we do not know anything of His private relations to other people; we have no materials for writing a biography of Him. But we have the Gospels, and what really concerns us is not whether we can know *about* Jesus, but whether we can know Him; and that is a question which every one can and must answer for himself. The greatest scholar in the world is not in a better position to answer it than the simplest and most untutored mind. For my own part, I say with confidence that it is not only possible to know Jesus through the Gospels, but that it is impossible for a sincere human being not to know Him. We not only know Him, we know Him better than anybody that ever lived, better even than we know our fluctuating, inconstant, half-moulded selves. The one thing that strikes a live mind in reading the

Gospels, is the simplicity of Jesus. There is never any rift or schism in His being, any want of equivalence between what He says and what He is. The character and the words are one harmonious and indissoluble whole. Jesus does not stand apart and speak *about* the truth; He speaks the truth simply, and it is the revelation of Himself. No other person has ever been able to make this kind of impression by His words. The Apostles do not make it. They bear witness to a truth which is independent of them; they know in part; they wrestle, as they speak, with something which is beyond them and greater than they. But with Jesus it is not so. His words do not reveal something from which He stands at a distance, as those may do who hear Him; it is He Himself who is expressed in them. The whole of Jesus is in every word He speaks. Think of the parable of the prodigal son, to take an utterance with which every one is familiar. Is there any sense in saying that we do not know the person to whom this wonderful story served as self-expression and as self-defence? We do know Him. We know Him as the true Son of the Father—of such a father as he who when he saw the lost son afar off, ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him; we know Him through and through, and there is no limit to which we cannot trust Him. We may have a thousand difficulties about the Gospels, a thousand unanswered questions about what is or is not precisely historical in them; but if we are simple and sincere in our approach to them, I do not see how we can fail to know Jesus. And is not this our happiness? Is it not on this we are really to be congratulated, that through the Apostles' testimony to

Jesus, and the testimony of the Spirit to that, our eyes can see and our ears hear the revelation on which Jesus felicitated them? How dark our world would be and dismal if the image of Jesus faded from our minds, if we could not see Him in whom we see the Father, if we had no story of the prodigal son, no good Samaritan, no great Physician, no life given as a ransom, no strong Son of God seeking and saving the lost, receiving sinners, a Captain of salvation to lead all who fight the good fight, one who in every word and deed reveals the Father in whom He lived and moved and had His being! But how bright our life is, how radiant, how full of reasons for congratulation, if Jesus has entered into it! The world into which His presence has come is another world. The people that sit in darkness have seen a great light; to them that sit in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

2. But turn now to the second aspect of this text—the revelation in it of the compassion of Jesus. It has always been one of the perplexities about the Gospel—one of the arguments alleged against it—that it was so late of appearing. If it is really the way of God's salvation, why was it not revealed from the beginning? Why were men allowed to sit for centuries and millenniums in darkness and the shadow of death? Why, indeed, are they allowed to sit in such darkness still? How few of all the children of men who live to-day, or who have ever lived, can have this beatitude of Jesus applied to them? These questions have received very different answers.

There have been Calvinistic theologians who answered them coldly. They saw in the actual course

of human history the whole expression of the will of God, and raised no question further. If innumerable multitudes of men have never known Jesus and the Gospel, it is by the will of God that this is so; they are not among His elect—that is the obvious fact—but it is idle to seek for any explanation of it. This way of turning time into eternity, and regarding what we see at any given moment as the fixed and eternal will of God, is only apparently philosophical, and is really possible only when we refuse to think and feel in sympathy with Jesus.

St. Paul, who thought about all human history, thought about this question also, but also rather formally. The times before the Gospel are to him "times of ignorance"; God "winked at" them; rather, overlooked them, did not press during them the responsibilities of men, as He does now when the Gospel and its call have come. Though He did not leave Himself without a witness, He allowed all the nations in the past generations to walk in their own ways; He was kind, forbearing, had the Gospel in view; but Paul himself does not enter into the situation with much sympathy.

Still less do we get anything out of the avowedly philosophical people who tell us that you cannot have a world at all unless you have differences in it—that if it is to have a history at all it must want in one age what it has in another, and that if human beings are to be knit into one society it must be by the mutual supplying of each other's needs, which means (of course) that some must always want what others have. This may be true, but it is one of the formal truths which do not reach the vital facts in which men are interested.

How different from all these is the tone in which Jesus speaks of the past. "I say unto you that many prophets and kings and righteous men have desired to see the things which ye see and have not seen them, and to hear the things which ye hear and have not heard them." For Him the dark immeasurable past is not filled with races and generations, but with men and their spiritual experiences. They are individualized in His mind, and His heart is touched into sympathy with their spiritual yearnings. He embraces in His compassion not only the multitudes around Him, who were like sheep without a shepherd, but those who in distant ages had seen the promise of God, and embraced it, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. This is one of the most consoling and inspiring words in the Gospel—this word which reveals the sympathy of Jesus with souls yearning for the revelation of the Father. Who implanted that yearning in them? Surely it was God Himself, from whom they came. It is His creative mark upon them, and He is a faithful Creator, who will not disappoint the longings He has kindled. We do not know all the wonders of His working, but if we trust the revelation of His love in this sympathetic word of Jesus we can only believe that they and we who live in the light of the Gospel shall be made perfect together.

It is passages like this which show the universality of the Gospel, and furnish the real justification for Christian missions. Jesus Himself was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and He never offered Himself to the wider world beyond. But though He was only sent to Israel, He was sent for the

world. And the proof of it lies in a saying like this which shows His yearning sympathy with those who under unfavourable conditions are nevertheless longing for the Father. Here He is only comparing present time with the past—the age in which He revealed the Father to men with the darker and less happy ages that lay behind; but if He were standing in the midst of us to-day—as we who know Him believe He is—would He not look out with the same yearning sympathy on the dim multitudes which lie beyond the borders of Christendom? They are not dim multitudes to Him. They are not inferior or alien races. They are human souls—some of them great souls, prophets and righteous men—who are seeking God if haply they may feel after Him and find Him, and whose restless hearts will not be satisfied till they see Jesus, and believe in God through Him. They are His, though they do not yet know it, and all that longing of their hearts is the Father drawing them to the Son. It is because there are such souls in the world that the work of missions is a Divine and hopeful work. God is preparing the way of His messengers everywhere. The Good Shepherd has sheep that are to be gathered into His fold from the north and the south, from the east and the west. He has the most vivid sympathy with them in all the outgoing of their souls to God. They can be so much to Him, and He can be so much to them. What a joyful hour it is when the supreme revelation breaks upon them through the preaching of the Gospel, and He can say again, "Happy are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear".

We have all heard a good deal lately of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. By far the

strongest impression it made on my mind was that there is no real difference between the work of missions and the work of the Church at home, and that what we need is not a greater interest in missions but a greater interest in the Gospel—that is, in the truth that Christ has come into the world, the revelation of the Father, and that no deep or satisfying happiness can enter human hearts but that which enters with Him. Of course there are differences of men, racial, historical, cultural, but in the long run they do not count. It is not to the Briton or the German the Gospel is preached in Europe, or to the Chinaman or the Hindu in Asia; it is to the soul yearning for God, or perhaps hardened against God; it is with the same inspiration, the same hidden allies, the same antagonists, the same soul travail, the same hope, everywhere. And with this word "hope" I will conclude, returning from the compassionate to the congratulatory side of our Saviour's word. It is only a joyful religion which has a right to be missionary: only one which is conscious of having found the supreme good will be eager to impart it. But surely if we are conscious of having found the supreme good, or rather of being found by Him, it should make us glad and confident. Some one said to me not long ago that he was struck with the number of hopeless ministers. There were so many men who had everything against them, who had an uphill fight, who despaired of making any more of it; they were pithless, apathetic, resigned; they entered beaten into the battle, or did not enter into it at all. I will say nothing unsympathetic of men whom it is not for their brethren to judge, but I will say this to every one who has accepted this vocation—that when we preach the

Gospel it must be in the spirit of the Gospel. It must be with the sympathy of Jesus for all who are yearning after God, and with the certainty of Jesus that in Him there is the revelation of God which will bring happiness to all yearning souls. So preached, it cannot be in vain. In Bengal and in Scotland, in our own race, and in the races most remote from our own, there are souls desiring to see the things that we see, and destined to be blessed with the vision. The evangelist's is no calling for a joyless and dispirited man. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance."

## LEARNING FROM THE ENEMY.

"And David said . . . let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him."
2 SAMUEL XVI. 11.

IT would be hard to imagine a provocation more exasperating than that which David met in this chastened spirit. As the old King of Israel, once the darling of his people, was making his escape from Jerusalem, a man who had some family connexion with Saul came out to gloat over his downfall. "Come out, come out," he cried, "thou man of blood, thou man of Belial; the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul in whose stead thou hast reigned." Nothing could have been more malignant and unjust. If David had exterminated the house of Saul when he came to the throne, he would only have done what was common in those times upon a change of dynasty; but in point of fact he had shown for his friend Jonathan's sake a rare and distinguished generosity to the descendants of his predecessor. He was slandered in the very point on which he might well have prided himself, and we cannot wonder that the combined insolence and falsehood of Shimei provoked the soldiers in his escort. Abishai would have made short work of the malignant Benjamite if only David had allowed him. But David had other thoughts in his heart, and it was the words of Shimei that had roused them. He was not a man of blood, in general terms, but there was blood on his

conscience for all that. He was not a man of Belial, in general terms, a worthless vicious character, but there was a hideous tragedy in which he was the villain. It was not the tragedy of the house of Saul, but of the house of Uriah the Hittite. The words of Shimei brought vividly to his remembrance things which touched him more deeply than any human malice could conceive—so deeply that in presence of them resentment could not live. David knew worse about himself than Shimei's bitter tongue could ever tell. And it is the same with us. The most malignant taunts of our enemies wound us, not by what they are, but by what they remind us of. And in bringing our real sins to remembrance, they not only silence resentment on our part, but call us to reflection, to patience, to humility, to penitence. It is only so that the wistful hope of David may be fulfilled for us: "It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for His cursing this day".

I wish to speak of some accusations—in the main false accusations—that have been brought against such people as ourselves, such Churches and such Christians as we are; and of the manner in which we ought to find spiritual profit in them.

Not long ago, in the appeal of a French missionary society for a week of self-denial, I found the following description of Protestantism by a well-known Roman Catholic teacher. "Protestantism is essentially the abolition of sacrifice. To abolish mortification, abstinence, and fasting; to abolish the necessity of good works, effort, struggle, virtue; to shut up sacrifice in Jesus alone, and not to let it pass over upon ourselves; no longer to say with St. Paul, 'I suffer that which

remains to be suffered of the sufferings of the Saviour'; but rather to say to the crucified Jesus, 'Suffer alone, O Lord'—there you have Protestantism." Let us put it quite definitely and apply it to ourselves: "There you have your religion, a religion without renunciation, without sacrifice, without that self-crucifixion which is the very essence of the religion of Jesus". This is how it actually appears to some people, and how they actually speak of it; but how are we to take it? It is easy to reply to the injustice it contains, and even to retort upon it. The Roman Catholic Church, we are apt to say, provides careers of renunciation for some of its members which are only too visible—not visible only but ostentatious. The orders of men and women who take vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience—who explicitly give up property of their own, a family life of their own, even a will of their own, in the daily ordering of their life—are conspicuous enough. Their sacrifices are not hidden; whatever they are, every one can see them. But history has anything but a favourable verdict to pass on this type of renunciation, and we have no disposition to be humble because we do not produce monastic orders. We are more inclined to rake up the scandalous chronicle of monastic history, and to thank God that Christianity in this form is with us a thing of the past. But that will not do us much good. The question remains, how comes it that Protestant Christianity ever made on a Romanist like Père Gratry the impression which it apparently did make. Granting that the religious orders have all the demerits and drawbacks that history reveals, are they not wrong forms of a right thing? And have we got that right thing in our life, in the place and the

power which are its due? In plain English, has the cross its proper place in our religion? Probably the cross of Christ has. We have all been brought up to believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified: to us as to St. Paul this is the epitome of Christianity. He bore the cross alone, and no one could help Him; He finished there the work of atonement which nothing men can do can ever supplement. This is quite true, but quite irrelevant. Jesus not only spoke of His cross, but of ours. "If any man will come after Me," he said, "let him deny himself, and take up *his* cross, and follow Me." Our principal hymns about the cross are in the strain, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling". I do not find fault with that; it is the suffering love of Christ which must always be the inspiration of the Church's praise, and of the Christian's cross-bearing. But what about our own cross, not the one to which we cling, but the one which we bear, and on which we are crucified? Is there really such a thing? I do not ask whether anybody else knows of it—it is nobody else's business—but whether we ourselves know. Is there really such a thing as self-denial in our lives? Have we ever made for Christ's sake renunciations and sacrifices which are painfully felt? Can we go back to some hour in our life, or is there something present in our experience even now, in virtue of which we can say that we know what is meant by the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, or that we have been able to drink of His cup? I believe it is a slander to say that Protestantism means the abolition of sacrifice, but it is a slander that should call to remembrance much self-indulgence, much complacency, much contentment with the average moral standard of

the world around us, much forgetfulness of Christ's demand for a denied and crucified self. It is not resentment or retaliation it requires, but the spirit in which David said, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him".

Here is another illustration. Two years ago our churches, in common with the churches of the Reformation everywhere, were celebrating the quatercentenary of the birth of Calvin. Innumerable speeches were delivered in appreciation of the work and influence of that great man. Among others there was a speech by a French man of letters which contained a notable criticism of the Calvinistic type of Christianity. The speaker made the amplest acknowledgment of what Calvinism had done not only for political liberty, but in particular for enlightenment, for education, and for science generally. But incidentally, he argued, it had intellectualized Christianity. It had laid stress on clear views of truth, and on the building up of such systems of theology as we have in our catechisms and confessions of faith. And in doing so it had made Christianity, perhaps unconsciously, a thing for men only, and even for educated men in whom the logical faculties are properly developed; it had destroyed or impaired its poetry, its power of appeal to children, to the uneducated, to imaginative and emotional natures. Here, again, I have no doubt there are answers to be given. We know that the children in our homes do get into the secret of our religion, and to those who have been brought up on the open Bible and who know all its finest pages by heart it is absurd to speak of the poetry of religion being lost. Nevertheless, we do not profit spiritually by speaking back, but by laying it to heart

when even the curse of a Shimei touches our conscience. Is it not true, after all, that the stalwart forms of Protestantism—those which, as Burke has it, represent the dissidence of dissent, the Protestantism of the Protestant religion—do tend to lose social power? Intelligence is cultivated, and independence, and the sense of individual responsibility—all good things, yet all things capable of degeneration and disproportion—and the sense of solidarity tends to be lost. It *is* one of the imperfections of our Church, even though it be an unfriendly voice which reminds us of it, that it does not conspicuously provide a spiritual atmosphere which all pious souls can breath alike, whatever their intellectual inequalities or even disagreements may be. There is something wrong here, and I believe it is correctly diagnosed in the charge that we have intellectualized our religion to excess. Religion is no doubt truth, and it is right for all who believe in it to try to find the most precise and adequate expression for the truth, but the value of such intellectual definitions is always secondary. The truth of which the Bible speaks is not only an intellectual truth which can be exhibited in doctrinal propositions; it is a truth, according to the Apostles, which has not only to be believed and known, but to be loved and done. It is something which has a spell in it to command affection and submission; it is something of which we have only an imperfect apprehension till we realize that it is identical with Jesus—"I am the truth"; and who does not feel that the sense of this personal, winning, commanding truth is too easily lost by those who are zealous (as we all should be) for sound doctrine? Perhaps this number is not very large in our time; far

more of us care nothing for Christian truth than too much. But it is not improbable that the charge of intellectualizing Christianity may come home to some consciences in another way. It is not that we exalt the logical faculties in religion at the expense of the imaginative or emotional, sacrificing the poetry of the Gospel to our orthodoxy, but that we give doctrinal soundness the primacy over moral. Which would shock you most, to hear that some member of this Church had become a Unitarian or a Roman Catholic, or to hear that he had been seen drunk, or that his books would not balance? I think I understand that state of mind to which the moral seems less heinous than the doctrinal defection, but surely the most malignant voice that can make us conscious of it, and shake us out of it, is the voice of God. How profoundly inconsistent it is with all the great fundamental utterances of the New Testament on the true nature of Christianity. "Not every one that saith unto Me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven." "If we know that He is righteous, we know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." Words like these, in which our Lord and the greatest of His Apostles unite, put us at the true point of view for judging what is and is not vital in the Church, and God requites us good for any curse which compels us to lay them to heart.

There is something akin to this in another criticism of the Church, with which we are all familiar. Nothing is commoner than to hear the church, and especially its office-bearers, denounced as guilty of downright

dishonesty with regard to its creed. They profess to believe it, we are told, but they do not and cannot believe it. They sign it on important occasions with solemn declarations of sincerity, and it is notorious that they are not sincere. No person of ordinary intelligence and education could possibly accept in the twentieth century the intellectual statement of religion which suited the sixteenth or seventeenth. The whole thing is revolting in its untruthfulness. Now it is quite easy here also to repel what is most offensive in such charges. They are often made by people who reject Christianity altogether, and who cannot understand that it still has power to win the assent and allegiance even of educated men. They are often made by those who forget that assent by an individual to what is part of the constitution of a society does not mean that the individual is to be annihilated in the interest of the society. A man may be thoroughly loyal in accepting the constitution of his country though he thinks it capable of amendment, and thoroughly loyal in accepting the creed of his Church though he would like to see it cleared or simplified. In point of fact our Church expressly gives those who sign its confession liberty to dissent from it on matters not entering into the substance of the Reformed faith: which is as ample a liberty perhaps as can be granted to those who wish to maintain their connexion with Christian history. But when everything has been said in defence of the present situation which can be said, is there not something even in the sneers and slanders of outsiders which should go to our conscience? Why should it be necessary to make any excuses at all? Why should the Christian Church, which is spoken of in Scripture as the pillar and buttress of the truth, of

all institutions in the world have to be perpetually defending itself against charges of insincerity, or even of downright falsehood? Why do we ask men still to sign what needs always a certain amount of explaining away? Why do we rack our brains to invent elastic formulæ which will seem to bind us to certain doctrinal statements but really leave us a good deal of rope? Why should it be possible for anyone to say that the Church of Scotland declares its acceptance of the Westminster Confession in language the whole recommendation of which is that it is thoroughly equivocal, or that in the United Free Church acceptance of the Confession is eased by a declaratory act which declares with regard to certain main doctrines of the Confession what the Confession itself does not declare? Ought we not to get out of the doubtful situations which give even plausibility to such impeachments of our honesty? Ought we not to find a broad and simple expression for our faith in Christ and loyalty to Him which could be sincerely accepted by all who call Jesus Lord, and trust in Him for salvation? People say this is not a creed-making age. Neither it is. But what if there should never be a creed-making age, in the sense of the seventeenth century, again? Even a good Christian, I think, might be content to believe that the Gospel would perpetuate its power in society and in individual souls without burdening anyone with such a complete intellectual outfit. It creates needless difficulties, and sometimes does tempt to equivocation and insincerity. And when we are denounced for such vices by unsympathetic outsiders, let us remember what David said about Shimei. It may be done in despite and hatred, yet it is God who is calling on us to enter into our conscience, and to make our ways

clear and simple before Him. There would not be the possibility of such cursing if we were walking in the light as He is in the light.

I will take one example more. The Church is cursed at the present time with great heartiness by many who profess themselves the friends of the poor. There is a socialist criticism which denounces it as essentially a capitalist institution, an inhuman thing. It is always on the side of the rich, or at least of the well-to-do. The working classes are lost to it just because they have gradually come to see that it has no interest in them. It is the abode of the selfish, who may well be content with things as they are, and who care nothing for the disinherited, the hopeless, and the wronged. You will not imagine that I am going to discuss the relations of the Church and socialism, or even to discuss what might be said in reply to such charges. We all know the amount of falsehood and malice which is in them. I preach in a different church almost every Sunday, but I have never preached in a church of capitalists yet. There are churches and individual Christians, we are well aware, that are distinguished for their sympathy with the poor, and for their works of practical beneficence. But instead of resenting or retaliating, let us ask what is the voice of God which becomes audible in our hearts through such slanders or beneath them. What is our real attitude to the poor? Is it the least like the fraternal attitude of Jesus in the Gospel? or do we not rather incline to judge them with a certain hardness of heart? If we are not poor ourselves, we think we have earned it; we have made our position of moderate comfort, or of modest independence; we have been diligent, self-denying, thrifty, independent; and we see no reason

why others should not be so, or take the consequences. If people are poor, they have earned that also: let them be poor. It is impossible to alter the laws under which God administers human affairs, and this is one of them. Of course there is such a thing as bad health, and even perhaps as bad luck, and we do not wish to be unsympathetic; but, broadly speaking, people get in the world what they work for, and if we take our own responsibilities we must not be asked to take other people's as well. This is the line on which much of our thinking and feeling spontaneously moves, but simply to follow it is not the way to get the good out of curses. I am sure it would be very difficult to follow it in the presence of Jesus. When we think of it, the economical principles by which men get on in the world are not identical with His teaching in this region. They do not contain everything which it contained. In the staple of our thoughts, in our ordinary temper, there is much inhumanity, much disinclination to think of the burdens and disabilities of others, much reluctance to give practical effect to the idea that society is truly Christianized only in proportion as the things which we value most are shared by all. This is the truth which the cursing of the Church by socialism should teach us, and it is to teach it, doubtless, that God has permitted the cursing. Can anyone deny, for example, that the mind of Christ about money, and the mind of the ordinary Christian about money, are worlds apart? The one thing most of us are afraid of is to be poor; the one thing which He really dreaded for men was to be rich. How hardly, He said, that is, with what difficulty, shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of Heaven! "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to

enter into the kingdom of God." The socialist criticism of the Church may be malignant or absurd, but do any of us believe that? Is there one of us who, if he had the opportunity to become rich, would decline it because he was risking his soul? Is there one of us who could be sure that to come into the possession of wealth would not intensify his love of wealth, and make him not only less liberal, but less humane, more on his guard against impostors, more rigorous and self-righteous in his judgment of the poor, more exclusive and self-centred, less expansive, sympathetic, and kind? It is bitter to be charged falsely with vices which may be quite alien to our character, but it is rarely that even a false charge does not bring something to our remembrance to humble us in the presence of God. It is of no profit to us to be angered by slander, and to retort upon those who utter it; very likely the one may be as easy as the other. The real profit is when it brings us into contact with something in our life to which in our self-complacency we have been blind—something of which the slanderer knows nothing, but which we feel before God more deeply than any wound He could inflict—and when we give ourselves in God's presence with penitence and humility to set it right with Him. There are such things, such memories, in the lives of all men; and perhaps in surveying the unjust and malignant things said about the Church or about Christians in general we have all been secretly reminded of some of them. It is good to be reminded. It is good to take them to heart. It is good to put resentment away, and with a contrite heart seek forgiveness and amendment from God. It is thus he brings good out of evil, and requites blessing for the curse.

# CREATION.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."—
GENESIS I. 1.

THE Bible begins with God: that is one of the marks which distinguish it not only from much ordinary thinking, but even from many of what are called religious books. It never attempts to prove that God exists: the existence of God is for it the primary certainty. It never seeks to rise through nature up to nature's God; for the Bible writers, God is far nearer, far surer, far more vividly real than nature. A heathen writer who wished to give such an account of the universe as we find in this chapter would start with the world, or with the dim confusion of elements out of which the world was to emerge; and in due time, as the confusion settled into order, the gods would appear in their proper place among the other beings constituting the universe. To such a writer, in short, his gods are part of the world; they belong to the glory and beauty which he sees around him; but to the Israelite his God is before the world and above it; He is its Creator; from beginning to end it is absolutely dependent on Him.

A modern mind, again, is apt to think of the world without thinking of God or of gods at all. The idea of creation has been displaced in it by that of nature. Nature means the world regarded as a system of

things having its life in itself, and capable of being interpreted without looking beyond it. In this there is no doubt a relative truth. Such as it is, the world is there, and it has an independence of its own. But the Bible point of view is that it owes this independence to God. He has given to it to have life in itself, yet it lives and moves and has its being in Him.

The main aspects in which creation is viewed in Scripture are two. In the first place, it is creation out of nothing. The world is originally and for ever dependent on a power beyond itself. It has no value, no reality, no being, but what it owes to Him who created and who sustains it. It is passing, passing, passing, but from everlasting to everlasting He is God. In the second place, it is creation in Christ. This is an idea on which great stress is laid in the later New Testament books. For Him who sees into the heart of things, in the light of the Christian revelation, the world is not merely a vast system of natural phenomena, it has a Divine and indeed a Christian meaning. It is all here with Christ in view. Nature is destined from the first to rise into a human and spiritual kingdom; embedded in its original constitution is a reference to the Person and the Sovereignty of Christ. There is not only the seal of God upon it, but in some deep mysterious way there is the promise of Christ in it. It is nearly a generation now since Professor Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" profoundly impressed a wide circle of Christian readers; but what the Bible doctrine of creation in Christ implies is something far more wonderful and Divine—it is spiritual law in the natural world, the tokens of Christ's presence and working in the whole

field of being. It is not, however, these general aspects of Bible teaching on creation which I wish to consider at present, but rather the religious significance of the doctrine of creation as Scripture reveals it. This may be put under four heads.

1. To begin with, creation in Scripture constantly appears as an inspiration to worship. The contemplation of heaven and earth fills the mind with adoring thoughts of God. We see it in Psalms like the 8th, the 19th, the 29th, the 36th, the 104th, and many more. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night teacheth knowledge. There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard. Their line is gone into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The Psalmist does not mean that he came to know God by studying astronomy; on the contrary, his mind was full of God when he looked up at the heavens over his head; but the changing splendours of night and day gave him a new sense of God's greatness, and opened his lips in adoration. Every one who knows God at all knows that He is great, but it is through the works of God in nature that imagination is quickened to apprehend His greatness, and that all that is within us is stirred up to magnify His name. We do not praise Him as we should till Nature, too, inspires our praise, and we join our voices to those who cry: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory".

This inspiration to worship is peculiarly needed at present for two reasons. One is the accidental reason that such a vast proportion of men now dwell in cities,

where Nature, it may almost be said, has ceased to be an appreciable part of the environment of their life. They do not see the face of the earth, and very often not the face of the sky. "Thou hast made summer and winter," says the worshipping Psalmist, but summer and winter are all one in our blank stony streets. "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness," he says again; but the townsman's year has no crown; unless he gets a holiday in the country, it is one monotonous strip of time. No doubt it is in the providence of God that city life has developed, but whatever the virtues it evokes in man, whatever the stimulus it applies to his intellect, his ambition, his faculty for government, it will hardly be contended that it is favourable to worship. It is rather in the face of nature than amid the importunate pressures of society that we can lose ourselves in the adoring contemplation of God. And when we get the opportunity to do so, surely it is a sin as well as a folly to carry as much as we can of the city's drawbacks into the country, and to prefer holiday resorts haunted by the same excitements which make it hard to realize God's presence when we are at home. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."

The second reason why we need that inspiration for worship which comes from nature is more serious: it is that our religion is specifically a religion of redemption. The question in which it originates on our side is, What must I do to be saved? and when that question has once been seriously asked, we soon realize that nature can do nothing to answer it. Neither earth nor sky nor sea—neither sun, moon, nor stars—have a word to say to the man who is suffering from a bad conscience. Hence when such a man finds the

Healer and the Saviour he requires, he is apt to concentrate his religion in the sphere of conscience. What is worse, he is tempted to concentrate it upon himself. He may sink so far as to imagine that God only exists to minister to him, and that he and not God is the centre of spiritual interest in the universe. There are other checks upon this repulsive degeneration of what should be the highest type of religion—the religion of the man who has been redeemed by the passion of a Divine love—but they need not be considered here. All I wish to say is that one of the preservatives against it is the surrender of the soul to those impulses to worship which come from the contemplation of nature. What must I do to be saved? is a question apart from which there is no Christianity, but it is not the only question which rises spontaneously in the soul made for God. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?" These also are religious questions, and it is a poor religion which does not ask them, and find in that which prompts them a new motive for worship. There is something pedantic in Sir John Seeley's idea that the God worshipped by the astronomer and the geologist, dwelling as they do in the immensities of space and time, is greater and more wonderful than the God of the average Christian. I do not believe that even Kepler or Newton was more profoundly impressed by the starry heaven, or by the unsearchable greatness of God revealed in it, than Job or Homer or the Psalmists. It is not science that is needed to enrich religion here—though no question it

has its contribution to make—but contact with nature and sensibility to it. It is through the senses, not through science, that imagination is impressed; but we need this impression to give elevation, dignity, and calm to worship, and to free it from settling feverishly on ourselves. The New Testament is not to be cut off from the Old, and it would be an immense enrichment of worship in many churches if they abridged their hymn-books, in which "personal" religion has run wild, and praised God oftener in Psalms like those just mentioned.

2. To go on to a second point: creation appears in Scripture not only as an inspiration to worship, but as an inspiration to trust in God. This is perhaps the point on which most stress is laid in the Bible itself: the doctrine of creation is called up to reassure those whose faith is being almost too severely tried. We find a striking instance of this in Jeremiah. God bids Jeremiah buy and pay for a field on which the Chaldean armies were encamped, with the assurance that it was quite a safe investment; in spite of its occupation by an irresistible enemy, houses and fields and vineyards should yet again be bought in that land. Jeremiah completed the bargain half despairing, and then, not to fall wholly into despair, he prayed, "Ah, Lord God! behold, *Thou hast made the heaven and the earth* by Thy great power and by Thy stretched out arm; *there is nothing too hard for Thee*". That is the use of this doctrine. When we let it sink into our minds, heaven and earth become a kind of picture of God's omnipotence; they are reassuring to all who trust in Him; they tell them with a sublime communicative confidence that God is able to keep His

word. And is it not this which explains the peculiar appeal to God in a prayer of Jesus uttered at a crisis in His career? "I thank Thee, O Father, *Lord of heaven and earth*, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." To judge by outward signs, it was an unprosperous and disappointing time for Jesus; but He can contentedly and even joyfully accept the will of the Father, disconcerting as it seems, because it is a sovereign and omnipotent will, which cannot fail to achieve its purpose in the way which seems good to it. Just because creation is an index to God's resources, it teaches us not to despair because we have come to the end of our own.

But nature, according to Scripture, is an invitation to trust on another ground. It is a revelation not only of the infinite power of God, but of His constancy. It is probably quite true to say that the people who wrote the Bible had no idea of what we mean by a law of nature; most of us have no very distinct idea ourselves. But they had a strong impression of the faithfulness of God as exhibited in all the great aspects of nature, and of the unreservedness with which He might be trusted. The alternation of day and night is God's covenant, and it is the very type of what can be depended on. It is because God is true to His word that we can count upon seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat. "For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations; Thou hast established the earth and it abideth. They continue this day according to Thine ordinances; for all are Thy servants." The laws of nature, as we call them, are the will of God; the im-

mutability of its laws, so far as it is a fact and a fact capable of interpretation, means the constancy of His character. They all invite us to trust in Him as a God who is worthy of trust, and will not put us to confusion. It is a bad conscience that sometimes makes us take them otherwise. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Why do we so often read this as a threat? Why do we not as instinctively read it as a promise? It is not one any more than the other, but a declaration confirmed by nature on every hand that God is faithful and can be counted on under all circumstances. He will not deny Himself nor fail His creatures.

Do we ever stay our faith thus in times of despondency, or win for our religion the amplitude and calm which belong to such a sense of God? Not even a New Testament believer, fervent as his trust in the Father may be, can afford to lose such a sublime inspiration to faith as Isaiah found in the midnight sky. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, *my* way is hid from the Lord, and *my* judgment is passed away from my God? He has forgotten to do *me* justice." If God is faithful *there*, He will be faithful *here*. That is the very description of what He is—a faithful Creator, as Peter calls Him. We may be sure that He will prove true to every hope He inspires, to every promise He implants, to every trust He evokes. The laws of nature do not restrain His freedom: they proclaim His trustworthiness. They say to

us, in the voice which goes out to the ends of the world, "Fret not thyself in any wise". "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him." He that believeth shall not make haste, but a peace and constancy like that of nature will fill his heart even as he trusts in God the Creator.

3. In a third way the doctrine of creation is important to religion: it contains a religious motive for the study of the world around us. Perhaps it was of history rather than of nature the Psalmist was thinking when he said, "The works of the Lord are great: sought out of all them that have pleasure therein"; but we may legitimately apply his words to our subject. A philosopher of our own has compared the face of nature to visual language—language addressed not to the ear but the eye. It is like the page of a book, a book written by the finger of God, and meant by God to be read; and surely of all people in the world those who believe that God *has* written it—those who believe that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth—ought to be most eager to read it. Yet in point of fact this is not the case. We owe our religion to Israel, but not our science; and often among ourselves we find that those who are absorbed in religion are indifferent to science, and those who are devoted to science are indifferent to religion. Sometimes in both cases the indifference passes into hostility, and histories have been written of the conflict between science and religion. I am not going to discuss this here, but surely it should be plain to the religious, at all events, that they can have no quarrel with science. If God created all that is, whoever finds out anything about the world is finding out

the truth of God. He may not know this, but it is the fact, nevertheless. The truths of astronomy with its infinite spaces and of geology with its measureless times, the truths of chemistry with its wonderful combinations and of physiology with its secrets of life and death, the truths of the higher and harder sciences of mind and history, they are all the truths of God. They are there to enlarge our knowledge and to exalt our thoughts of Him, and every man of science is in this sense a minister of religion. God, in the works of His hands around us, is calling us to enter into His thoughts ; He is putting his own powers and resources at our disposal, and it is not impious, but a part of true religion, to try to follow God's thoughts as they are embodied in creation, and to use in His service the powers which He has there placed within our reach.

But since this is so, and since it is so plain, why should there have been the friction which has undoubtedly existed between men devoted to science and men devoted to religion ? Why have religious people suspected science, and why has science sometimes proclaimed war on religion ? I suppose the reason must be in the main that they have misunderstood one another—failed to appreciate each other's interest in the world. The scientific man looks at the world and calls it nature. Nature means the world regarded as having its life in itself ; there it is, and he takes it as it stands, raising no question as to its origin, its end, or its relation to anything beyond. But nature in this sense is not a Bible word at all ; the very idea of it is foreign to the Bible ; what we find there is creation, and creation means the world regarded as having life not in itself, but only in and

through God. Nature is self-subsistent, but creation subsists through the Creator. Nature is there for itself, but creation is there as the scene of a spiritual life, the theatre of the acts and government of God. The scientific man, who takes nature one piece at a time, is apt to feel that at no particular point is God essential. But when we see how every science leads out of itself into another, as every department of nature issues into the whole—when we feel that all the truths of all the sciences are parts of one truth, and that that truth can only live and move and have its being in an eternal mind which is akin to our own—then we realize that nature is not without God, and without compromising the integrity of our science we can bring it into a living connexion with our religion. It is only in this connexion that the study of nature is truly reverent, and uplifting to the soul. It is conscious at once of the nearness of God in nature, and of his transcendence—of the intelligibleness of things, and of their unsearchable mystery. In both these characteristics it is akin to religion : religion also knows God, and knows that He passes knowledge. If religious people had always done their part in the study of the works of God, that sincere and reverent study which their Divine origin demands; and if scientific people had always remembered that every separate truth becomes false when it is cut off from relation to truth as a whole—that is, to the mind of God—we might have been spared much misunderstanding and strife, and a more noble and intelligent praise would have gone up to God from the hearts of all His children. This great reconciliation has yet to be fully accomplished, but the key to it lies in the very first sentence of the Bible.

4. Our last inference from the creation of all things by God remains: the life of man—his life as a free moral being—must have in the last resort a positive relation to the world; or rather man must recognize that in the last resort nature is positively related to his moral calling. In other words, it is a system of things which will be found to be on the side of man's higher life, and from which it is fatal for him to cut himself off. It is necessary to say "in the last resort," for in ourselves, nature is no longer what God made it; without professing to solve the mystery of evil, we must acknowledge that in us nature is rather what *we* have made it, that it casts a deforming shadow on what is in itself perfect, and puts the world out of joint. Even if it were not so, there would be a certain disproportion between what we are and what we are called to make of ourselves in the world —such a disproportion as implies effort and strain in a developing moral being—in a word, the denial of self. We cannot imagine any other situation for ourselves than one in which the moral life has to be *conquered* in and from nature; every inch of morality has to be won in incessant and resolute conflict. But though we must fight this good fight till our last breath, though we must deny the evil nature that is in us, and put to death, as Paul says, our members that are on the earth, we must not because of this excommunicate the good creation which is the work of God. The world as God has made it—the actual world into which we are born, and for which on every side of our nature we have affinities—that whole of nature into which we strike our roots to the centre—that and no other is the world in which we

have to live a spiritual life. It is very natural when we feel the strain of the conflict to think that the sure way to victory is to renounce the world altogether, to cut the connexion with nature at the root, to cultivate a goodness which owes nothing to the world as God made it, and is a purely spiritual, sublimed, and supernatural thing. It is very natural to do this, but all experience proves it to be both a mistaken and a disastrous course. The virtue that is not rooted in nature—that has not the sap of nature in it—that does not articulate itself into the great life of the world and rejoice in God's presence and goodness there, is an impotent and ineffective thing; it does not tell on the world to any intent of which God approves; it tends inevitably to be Pharisaic, and is destitute of redeeming power. There is a place for asceticism, undoubtedly, in every spiritual life, but it is not a principle which can claim the whole sphere of morality for its own. In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and every creature of God is good, and to be received with thanksgiving. It is the morality which rests on this basis, and not that which makes it a principle to abstain from marriage and from meats, which can really establish the kingdom of God in the natural world which God has made. We must rectify the perversions which are due to ourselves, and once right with our Creator we shall know how to be right with all His works. We shall be able to say with St. Paul, "All things are ours; all things work together for good to them that love God".

When we have passed all these things in review—the inspirations it yields to worship, to trust, to knowledge, and to a rich moral life—we still cannot keep

the insignificance of nature from returning on our minds. Nature without God is nothing. Even man without God is nothing. To learn this is to learn one of the greatest truths of religion. It has inspired the loftiest poetry, or all but the loftiest.

> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself
> And all which it inherit shall dissolve,
> And like an insubstantial pageant faded
> Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

This is nature by itself. But the higher truth of nature—the positive truth on which its place in religion depends—has been expressed in poetry if possible still more sublime, because in it God is present in His world, and all creation attests His presence. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts: all the earth contains is His glory." No worship is complete that has not in it an amen to the voice of the seraphim.

## THE GREAT CHARTER.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."—GENESIS I. 26.

THE Bible begins with the story of creation, and invites us to think of the religious import of the truth that the whole universe is dependent upon God. But its main interest is not in creation, or as we now say in nature, but in man; and in this ancient narrative man has a place apart. His creation is no doubt part of the creation of all things, but it is preceded by a Divine deliberation, it is carried out after a Divine pattern, and it is accompanied by a great charter: "Let them have dominion over all the earth".

These things need to be emphasized. Within the last generation, more than at any earlier period, our minds have been trained to look mainly at the connexion between man and nature. Man, it cannot be denied, is a natural being, a part of the physical universe, like everything else that we see. He has a physical ancestry, originates in physical processes, is subject to the same conditions of life as the other animals, needs the same air, light, heat, food, and so forth, is subject to the same diseases, and succumbs at last to the same death. His being is part of the one

vast web of life which is perpetually being woven and unravelled in the world. This is truth, and cannot be put too strongly. It is what the Bible means when it says, *He also is flesh.*

But is it the whole truth? Is man merely a piece of nature? is he merely the last term in an ascending series of animals, the consummation or crown of the natural process? No one who has really reflected would answer in the affirmative. It is true that all forms of life are akin; it is true that we are blood relations of everything that breathes: it is true that there is only one chemistry, one physiology, for the interpretation of life in every degree from the amphioxus up to man. But if this is a humbling and perhaps a depressing truth—if it casts the shadow of physical necessity over what we are accustomed to regard as the realm of human freedom—let us consider on the other hand that the only chemist, the only physiologist, the only interpreter of nature in her one and pervasive life is man. Man is not only a part of nature, he confronts nature as nothing which is only a part of it could do. He confronts it and includes it at the same time. He is not only the crown of nature, he is in some sense its king. It is his territory, his inheritance. He confronts it with a sovereign self-consciousness. He is not only, like other living creatures, a subject which science studies; unlike other living creatures he is the creator of the very science by which this study is carried on. Though he lives in time, he is not time's fool; a relation to God, to eternal truth, to inviolable duty, to a free calling in which nature is subject to him, is just as much a part or characteristic of his being as his kinship to nature as a whole, and the rooting of

his life in the physical system around him. This is not only recognized in every sound philosophy: it stands on the first page of the Bible as part of its conception of the true constitution of man. It is what the Bible means when it tells us that *God created man in His own image*, and gave him *dominion over all the earth.*

If we meant to study the image of God in man, the best plan would probably be to go directly to the New Testament. The beginnings of human life and history lie beyond our reach, and all that anthropology can do for us seems to illustrate rather the natural than the supernatural in man, rather his relation to nature than what is just as certain, though not so easily traced, his relation to God. When our minds are turned to this last, it is the second Adam, not the first, to whom we must look. It is He alone—Jesus Christ our Lord—who is expressly called in Scripture "the image of the invisible God". It is in Him we see the Divine likeness in which—or, as some people would now prefer to say, for which—we were made. To see Him, and especially to believe in Him, evokes those capacities in us through which our life is connected with God, and so enables us to attain the ends for which we are created. But it is not the Divine image in particular that I wish to speak of, but the Divine charter which was given to our race along with it. This is expressed here in the words, "Have dominion . . . over all the earth". It is not a peculiarity of the Old Testament: on the contrary, it is precisely the same thought which we find in the New, where St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "All things are yours . . . the world, or life, or death, things present or

things to come; all are yours". The sovereign self-consciousness of man in presence of the world is part of the true religion from beginning to end, and it is well worth while, therefore, to consider the ways in which it is exercised.

Speaking generally, it may be said that this sovereign self-consciousness of man, resting as it does on his relation to God, binds him to exercise his sovereignty over nature in accordance with what he knows to be God's will. Man is not an absolute or irresponsible king; his sovereignty is delegated to him by God; it belongs to him only as he is made in the image of God, and it must be exercised within the limits of the Divine charter. Where God is unknown or forgotten—where the true religion is unknown or debased—man may live in childish terror of the world and its forces, or he may use and abuse them in ways which are merely degrading to himself; but in his true sovereignty he is at once free, and under responsibility to God. Creation is the realm in which his sovereignty is exercised, and he exercises it in a way which reveals at once his kinship to the Creator and his sense of responsibility to Him. What, then, let us ask in more detail, are the ways in which man avails himself of the charter which God has written on his nature, "Have dominion"?

1. Originally, no doubt, man exercised his sovereignty in the world *instinctively*, that is, without conscious reflection. There is something in him always which impels him to regard the earth as his in an exclusive sense. He finds it preoccupied by other creatures, but that does not embarrass him. He believes it is meant for his abode, and that his claim

to it is superior to every other. He feels quite justified in exterminating some animals, in domesticating others to do him service, and in using others again to support his life. No doubt in this general exercise of sovereignty man may have erred, just as those smaller sovereigns have erred whose rule did not extend to "all the earth," but only to one little corner of human society; no doubt he may have been, and may still be, selfish, tyrannical, and cruel. To say that all things, and in particular all forms of life, are lower than humanity, and therefore have value only in relation to it, is not to say that human beings can lawfully use other forms of life in any way they please. It is only as made in God's image that man is entitled to exercise sovereignty, and he dare not exercise it in a way that debases or denies that image itself. A higher race of men is not exercising its dominion legitimately—it is not exercising it in a way congruous to the charter and to the Divine relationship of man on which it is based—when it virtually denies the image of God in a lower, and treats its members as if they were brutes or tools. It is not exercising its dominion legitimately when it brutalizes its own nature—in other words, defaces and insults the Divine image in man—by torturing dumb creatures for its recreation, as in bull fighting, pigeon shooting, and many so-called sports. Cruelty to animals is not justified by the Divine charter which says, "Have dominion". Even the infliction of pain in the pursuit of knowledge which has the assumed good of humanity in view has moral dangers which it is not safe to ignore. If vivisection makes a man inhuman, it is for that man an illegitimate exercise of man's dominion over the creatures. The creatures belong

to God, and they are ours only as we are His. We can do as we will with them, and with the whole world around us, so long as our doings contribute to the building up in the world the kingdom of Him whose right it is to reign. But arrogance, heartlessness, inhumanity, arbitrary self-will, are no part of the Divine charter God has granted to our race. We can have no "dominion over all the earth" except as partaking in and contributing to His sovereignty, who is just and good in all His ways.

2. It marks a more advanced stage in human progress when man begins to exercise his delegated sovereignty over all the earth through *science.* Science is the methodical interpretation of nature, the mapping out of our great inheritance, the cataloguing of its resources and of our treasures in them. Nothing more clearly reveals the truth that man is made, and is continually being more completely made, in the Divine image. Kepler spoke of the aim of all his scientific efforts as the thinking of God's thoughts after Him. To think God's thoughts after Him is to that extent to be initiated into His secrets and to obtain command of His resources. He who learns to think God's thoughts learns at the same time, in a corresponding measure, to wield God's power. And so far at least as nature is concerned, there seems to be no limit set to the extent to which we may do either. In this sense we may go on extending our dominion over the creatures indefinitely.

For the last three hundred years, this has been increasingly the task of man. The proportion of human intelligence devoted to the enlargement of science and to its practical applications becomes continually

greater; more minds are educated in this way, and more intelligence is given to this pursuit, than at any earlier period. The sciences of nature have been created—astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology. The forces in nature have been studied, mastered, and applied. Dominion over all the earth in a true and lofty sense is easily and widely exercised. The astronomer enables man to make the trackless seas his pathway to distant lands. The physicist masters the laws of heat, and the steam engine toils for us in every factory, on every railroad, on almost every ship in the world. The laws of light are mastered, and even a child can play with a camera, and make the sun take pictures for him. The laws of electricity are mastered, and not to speak of light and power, we send messages by the telegraph, or speak through the telephone, as though space had ceased to be. The human mind has never done anything over which it has been so elated. No triumph has ever been attended by such an incessant blowing of trumpets. And in a way this is quite legitimate, for all this interpretation and exploitation of nature is the fulfilment of the great charter—Have dominion. But more and more with the years there has become audible behind this song of triumph a strain of misgiving, and sometimes even of disappointment and despair. It is as though man were burdened by his very achievements—wearied, as the prophet says, with the greatness of his way. He has captured nature, but captive nature has in turn made him her captive. His train can run sixty miles an hour, and no matter how the pace shakes his nerves, he dare not travel more slowly. He can speak across the four hundred miles which separate Glasgow from London, and he must do busi-

ness at that tension, or make room for those who can. Nature has revenged herself by getting dominion over him. What shelter to grow ripe has he, what leisure to grow wise? It is as though we could do everything with our inheritance *except* have dominion over it.

Disconcerting as this may be for the moment, there is no reason why we should be discouraged by it. It is only the reappearance in our own time of an experience which has haunted the whole history of advancing knowledge. He that increaseth knowledge, the preacher tells us, increaseth sorrow; to master the laws and the resources of nature is not (in this mood) a high calling with which God has called us, a noble charter which He has bestowed upon our kind; it is a sore travail which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. Always, too, from time to time in the history of science there have been on this ground what may be called Puritanic reactions against it—protests, which their authors no doubt regarded as spiritual, against man's intoxication with it, against the strain which its practical applications put upon human nerves, against the luxuries and conveniences which it multiplies and makes necessary, so that the hardy simplicity and composure of a manlier age are lost. Even the Bible, in which all human experiences are reflected, reflects this one also. Genesis itself shows us that Babylon is only built at the cost of Eden, and Jeremiah holds up the impracticable virtue of the Rechabites, which would have extinguished not only drunkenness but civilization, as a pattern to his degenerate contemporaries. The true inference to draw from such moral phenomena is that science and its applications are not the ultimate fulfilment of the

charge—Have dominion. In one sense they do fulfil it, but in another they only set it for us over again. They reveal more clearly the world in which man's sovereignty is to be exercised: he sees his task (or his privilege) on a higher plane, in a more exacting form. It was easier—or we think it was—to have the sense of sovereignty in a simple, narrow, leisurely world; it is hard to achieve and hard to retain it in that complicated and swiftly moving world in which science compels us to live. But this only means that in such a world as ours it is peculiarly necessary to hear God say, Have dominion, *as made in the image of God.* Remember your relation to Me. Remember the supernatural likeness in which you are made, and in the sense of your connexion with God, whose all these things are and whom they all serve, do not be overborne by them; be their sovereign, not their slave. Strengthen yourself in God, and reflect that it is only by making the task harder and harder that it is possible for God to give you a larger and larger possession of the image in which you were made.

3. Instinctive impulse, and science with its wonderful applications, are modes in which man exercises a dominion over nature, but his sovereignty is even more wonderfully demonstrated in *art.* In art, as contrasted with applied science, there is always something creative. It is the nearest approach which man can make to working as God works. Man's dominion over the world, his power to appropriate and to use for his own ends all the glory and beauty of nature, all the joy and sorrow, all the splendour and the mystery of life, is nowhere more signally displayed than in the great works of painters and sculptors, musicians and poets.

They demonstrate the freedom and sovereignty of the spiritual being in a way hardly less than Divine, and they help all who can appreciate them to partake in the same dominion. We are lifted above the world and every sort of bondage to the necessities with which it encompasses us, when we enter into the genius to which nature and the life of man are but the raw material or the unconscious prompting for works of enduring truth and beauty. The gifted minds to whom the rest of us are debtors in this region show us in one conspicuous way how the Divine charter is made good —Have dominion over all the earth.

But if this cannot be easily denied, it can just as little be put forward as the whole solution of the problem. How many men of genius could be named who were so far from having this universal sovereignty that they were not even masters of themselves? Genius may be used to assert and display man's dominion over the world, but it may lie neglected and unused, or it may be used to unworthy ends. It is a gift, and like every other gift it needs guidance. It is not genius which is made in the Divine image, but man; and apart from a sense of responsibility to God and humanity, genius may quite well be prostituted and wasted. It may be used in a way which enslaves man to what is beneath him in nature, instead of helping him to realize dominion over it; and when this happens, the power it exerts in degrading is as great as that which it might have exerted in uplifting and inspiring man. It is hardly true to say that in such cases the light that leads astray is light from heaven. Genius is not of itself a light from heaven. It is rather part of the nature over which man is to have dominion,

as well as a power of asserting dominion over other parts; and man, in virtue of his nature as made in the Divine image, is entitled to judge all natural gifts, even the supreme gifts of genius, and the use to which they are put. Genius helps us to attain the sovereignty to which we are called only when he who is endowed with it has won the same sovereignty over his genius itself—in other words, when he uses it in the sense of responsibility to God, and in view of man's chief end. It is always the altar which sanctifies the gift. What can be truly said at last is that when gifts of genius are laid on the altar of God they help us, as no other powers or efforts do, to attain to the sovereignty set before us in our creation.

4. In conclusion, the sovereignty which was bestowed on man at the beginning, in virtue of his creation in the image of God, is only exercised effectively as that image is renewed and realized in us. It is only exercised effectively through true religion, or *the life in God.* If we wish to see it in its normal operation we have to look to Jesus, who was "the image of the invisible God," or to those who have been redeemed by Him and are fulfilling the Divine calling of the race in His strength. Who can truly say that the great charter —Have dominion—has been made good to him? Who can truly say that it is being made good? Only the man who through Christ has been made right with God to the very depth of his being, and who has the inward assurance that henceforth everything in God's world is his ally. It is he who has the consciousness of superiority to all outward things, and who knows that all that befalls him, however untoward it may seem, must contribute to his life toward God. If it is

not an echo of this text which we find in the eighth chapter of Romans, it is the Christian key to it. "We know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God." "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." All things are ours when we are His. This is the form in which our sovereignty is asserted in the New Testament.

But who is equal to such utterances as these? In the first chapter of Genesis we have the Divine ideal for man; in the eighth of Romans the Divine fulfilment of it, amid all the trials of life, by the way of redemption. But the ordinary life we live, and by which we are apt to measure reality, is too little in contact with either. Often we feel that the world is our enemy, that all things are against us, and that they are too hard for us. The growing sense that man is implicated in nature makes it harder to believe in his sovereignty over it. Once men thought of the world mainly as the scenery of their life, the stage on which the moral drama was transacted, and then it was easy enough to feel independent; but now we know it is not only scenery, but soil; the roots of our being are interwoven with it, and we do not know how to conceive of freedom, not to speak of dominion. In proportion, too, as the merely physical conditions of existence are mastered, the moral task seems to become more complicated. Few of us here need to fear cold or hunger; to that extent our dominion over the earth has been made good. But the organized and elaborate

system of life through which this has been secured has a new power of its own to bring us into bondage, and it is a new and not an easier task to live a free and sovereign life in it in the image of God. It is a task we can only fulfil if we have the assurance of a present love of God reaching deeper into life than its most distressing and hopeless conditions. The whole message of the New Testament is that there is such a love, and that it has been made sure to us in Christ. The one thing which makes the world impracticable to us, which baffles every attempt on our part to live a free and sovereign life in it, is sin; we face it with an evil conscience and a corrupt nature, and all things are against us. It is not every one who can say, We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. It is they only who have learned, as St. Paul had, that in Christ a love of God has come into the world which has gone to the very depth of our need, which has taken on itself the strain of the problem our sin had created, which has given us a new standing ground from which to face our calling, and has made us more than conquerors. Civilization, science, and art do not themselves establish man's dominion in the world; they rather challenge man again and again, at higher and higher levels, under more and more exacting conditions, to establish his dominion if he can. And he can, when at the cross of Christ, where the love of God bears even the sin of the world, he takes hold of that last and deepest reality which subdues all things to itself. His sovereignty comes back to him when he is united to Christ, whom God has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

# THE IDEAL CHURCH

"And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' teaching and in the fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and the prayers."—ACTS II. 42.

THERE are two ways in which the New Testament exhibits to us the ideal of the Church. One is doctrinal, and is illustrated in the epistle to the Ephesians. There the Church is set forth as the end of all the ways of God—the body of Christ which is filled with his fullness—the new humanity in which all the enmities and divisions of the old are transcended—the glorious bride of Christ, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The other is historical, and is illustrated in this passage of Acts. Here we see the Church, as Luke saw it in his mind's eye, in the days of its splendid prime, when the memory of Jesus was vivid and the gift of the Spirit new. Beginnings may not always be perfect, but there is always something inspiring about them, and something authoritative as well. To a Romanist, the doctrine of the Church is in a very real sense the only doctrine of Christianity; if he is right about this, he cannot be wrong about anything else. Protestants give the Church a very different place both in their thoughts and their faith; but as we all, in point of fact, have some relation to the Church, it is well that we should realize its significance in the New Testament.

This passage presents us with four notes of the true Church as they impressed an early disciple, and I shall say a few words in explanation and enforcement of each.

1. They continued stedfastly in the teaching of the Apostles—rather, they waited assiduously upon their teaching. Some connexion with the Apostles is necessary if the Church is to be true to its ideal, for the Church is Christ's Church, and the Apostles are the ultimate witnesses to Christ. A society which repudiated the teaching of the Apostles would not be the Christian Church nor entitled to the Christian name. Sometimes the connexion with the Apostles, apart from which a Church cannot be Christian, is supposed to be secured by what is called the apostolic succession of the ministry. The Apostles, it is asserted, ordained men to continue their office in the Church, and they in turn ordained others in an unbroken line reaching to our own time. It is this official continuation of the ministry on which the apostolic and therefore the Christian character of the Church depends. About this there are two things to be said. The first is, that there is not a Christian minister in the world, from the Bishop of Rome up or down, who can prove that he himself stands in any such unbroken succession. And the second is, that even if it could be proved, it would be quite irrelevant as a mark of the true Church. Such an external, legal, formal continuity, even if it existed, could guarantee nothing spiritual, and it is on spiritual consanguinity with the Apostles and their testimony to Jesus that everything depends. A historical succession, could it be really traced, would have something imposing for the imagination; it would not be without interest for the intelligence; but to

conscience it could never mean anything at all. The connexion with the Apostles which marks the Church as Christian is not to be sought in any external continuity of church officers, but in fidelity to apostolic teaching. Wherever such fidelity is found we have the primary note of the apostolic Christian Church.

What then, we naturally ask, did the Apostles teach? A little further on in this book their enemies describe them as unlearned and ignorant men; but they took knowledge of them, we are told, that they had been with Jesus. This gives us the answer to our question. They had been with Jesus; they knew Jesus better than anybody else did; they never wearied telling about Him, and the Church never wearied hearing. That is what is meant by, "They continued stedfastly in the teaching of the Apostles"; it means they could never hear enough about Jesus. Our authorized version renders the words, "They continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine"; but that is both too narrow in itself, and to the ordinary reader suggests something false. No doubt the Apostles had doctrine even in the current sense: they had facts and interpretations of facts which constituted their Gospel, and apart from which they could not have borne their testimony to Jesus at all. St. Paul tells us what these were at the very beginning—the primary truths of the Gospel in which He and the Twelve had always been at one. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—He was buried—the third day He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures." But though this was no doubt accepted by all the disciples, something wider is meant here. The teaching of the Apostles would include their whole testimony to Jesus, and we have every reason to believe that it is truly represented in

the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is the primitive deposit of the apostolic testimony. We must remember in particular that it contained not only doctrines in the narrower sense of the word, but the revelation of a new life to which Christians were called. "Go and make disciples of all nations . . . *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" Everything that is covered by the name of Jesus, the whole appeal made to men by His words and life and death, is included in the teaching of the Apostles to which the early Church was devoted. And it is the mark of the true Church always that it remains devoted to this teaching, and can never hear too much of the life and death, of the love and will, of its Lord.

There are plenty of people, of course, outside the Church who have a sincere contempt for sermons. There are plenty of people inside who would like, as they put it, to enlarge the field of interest, and to hear the minister of the Church on all sorts of literary, economical, or political questions. There are even people who disparage preaching on the plea of devotion: we do not go to church to hear sermons, they say, but to worship God. The mouths of all these people would be shut in a church waiting assiduously on the teaching of the Apostles, always eager to hear more about Jesus. Preaching is much more likely to fail, even in interest, from want of concentration than from want of range. There are plenty of people to talk politics and literature, and not too many to bear witness to Jesus who will yet extend His sceptre over every field. If the sermon in church is what it ought to be—if it is not an exhibition of the preacher but of Jesus—there should be nothing in it even conceivably in contrast with wor-

ship, but the very reverse. What can be more truly described as worship than hearing the word of God as it ought to be heard, hearing it with penitence, with contrition, with faith, with self-consecration, with vows of new obedience? If this is not worship in spirit and in truth, what is? We may sorrowfully confess that in all our churches there is too little worship, that adoration is rare, that while singing is enjoyed the sacrifice of praise is hardly conceived, and the ardour and concentration of prayer strangely unfamiliar, but we will not mend these deficiencies by thrusting into the background the testimony to Jesus. Such a testimony is the only inspiration to worship in the Christian sense of the term, and it is the primary mark of the true Church that it gathers round this testimony and is unreservedly loyal to it.

2. The second mark of the Church in its early beauty was that they continued stedfastly in the fellowship. Fellowship is a word that has now been practically appropriated to religious uses, which means, unhappily, that it has lost any distinct significance for the ordinary reader. But its meaning here is tolerably plain. Strictly it signifies joint participation, or mutual giving and receiving, and it refers to the peculiar conditions of life in that early society as they are described in the opening chapters of Acts. "They were together"; "they had all things common"; "no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own"; "there was no one in want among them"; "distribution was made to every one according as he had need." The Church was a family in which the new law of love was actually kept—so the historian puts it—even in regard to the outward necessities of life. This, and not something intangible or merely spiritual is in his

mind when he says, "They continued stedfastly in the fellowship". And this, we must not forget, is a note of the ideal Church.

We need not be astonished that it has been criticized. Students of the New Testament have sometimes thought that Luke both exaggerated the teaching of Jesus about riches and poverty—being a lover of voluntary poverty himself—and that he exaggerates in these passages the extent to which community of goods existed or was approved in the early Church. So far as it was produced, too, in a moment of enthusiasm, they find it comparatively easy to disparage it. It meant no great sacrifice, they suggest, in a community in which practically every one was poor—with a climate in which the body could be satisfied with one garment, and with one meal a day—in a civilization which was not dependent like ours on accumulation of wealth—and above all, in a world which might at any moment come to an end. Further, it was a failure. Even the presence of Jesus could not secure "the fellowship" of the Twelve from the inevitable risks: Judas the treasurer was a thief and pilfered the paltry funds of the society. The fellowship of the primitive Church was responsible for Ananias and Sapphira. It was responsible for the poverty of the Jerusalem Christians which made them a burden on the Gentile Churches in Galatia and Asia, in Macedonia and Achaia. The saints sank under it into paupers, and as Paul discovered at last, into ungrateful paupers. What they ought to have been taught was that independence is as much a part of the Christian ideal as charity, and that it is short-sighted policy which forgets this.

In speaking of "the fellowship" of these early believers as a mark of the ideal Church, I am not careful

to answer the *advocatus diaboli* who urges such arguments against it. The problem of poverty is not so simple—certainly it is not so simple with us—nor is the solution of it so easy, as the early Christians supposed. But the instinct which impelled them in dealing with it was genuinely Christian, and apart from that instinct we shall never be able to deal with it at all. We must not disparage on any ground whatever the first *bona fide* attempt to make human brotherhood real. There is no true Church where the effort to do this has ceased. "Let brotherly love continue." "Love the brotherhood." "Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love." "Remember the poor." The more things we have in common, material as well as spiritual, the more we realize the ideal of a Christian Church. Within the Church, there ought not to be such a thing as neglected and unsuccoured poverty, and so far as I can judge there is not much. The Church does not neglect its poor members, and perhaps those who complain that it neglects the poor in general—that is, neglects to help them in their poverty—forget how difficult it is to help those who refuse to have any relation with others except that of holding out their hand. The people who are here said to have continued stedfastly in the fellowship were all alike members in a society where personal relations of every kind were intimate, and it was this which made "the fellowship," such as it was, possible. It was one feature in a society where, thanks to the influence of Jesus, many were willing to say, All that is mine is yours; but it cannot be reproduced, even with its drawbacks, in a society where the only cry is, All that is yours is mine. Do not let us forget that with all its drawbacks it was an inspiration of love, and that though love needs wis-

dom to guide it, without love—active, sacrificing, positive love—there is no Church at all.

3. The next note of the Church is of another kind, yet closely connected with this. "They continued stedfastly in the breaking of the bread." To break bread means in the Bible to eat, or to take food; but it came to be appropriated very early to the sacred meal in which Christians declared the Lord's death. It is synonymous, for all practical purposes, with the Lord's Supper; and it is another mark of the ideal Church, as Luke apprehended it, that the Lord's Supper has a central place in its worship.

The history of the Supper, or perhaps it should be said of the sacraments in general, is the most heart-breaking and discreditable chapter in the whole story of Christianity. Those who call themselves Catholic Christians no doubt give the sacraments a great place in their religion. But the doctrine of the sacraments, in its so-called Catholic form, is a mere defiance to the mind of man—a mixture of religious materialism, of superstition, of magic, of impossible metaphysics, with no indubitable result but that of the enslavement of the Church to the priesthood. It is not wonderful that in repelling, as they are bound to repel, a system of ideas and practices which is not only thoroughly unchristian but thoroughly irrational, Protestants should sometimes have been tempted to lose patience with the whole subject round which it has been constructed. Some have dispensed with sacraments; some have proposed to suspend them for a generation or two till the superstition which has grown about them has died down; and many, to say the least, are embarrassed. Baptism is supported by sentimental as much as by Christian convictions. In "Catholic"

churches the number of communicants as compared with the whole number of church people is very small, and among Protestants there are many to whom the Communion Sunday is rather a day of misgiving than of peculiar joy. The popular apprehension of the sacraments has shrunk, in fact, in many cases, to something purely negative. The ordinary church member does not believe that baptism regenerates, and he does not believe in a real presence of Christ in the bread and wine. It would be renouncing the very faculties God has given him to believe such things; it would be renouncing all that he means by faith in God Himself. And however he may be embarrassed by the sacraments, he finds it quite impossible to depart from this position.

But surely mere negation cannot comprehend the whole truth. Surely Christ did ~~not~~ institute ordinances of any kind only that those who believe in Him might confess themselves baffled by them. If we negate one thing, it must be to affirm another. With the negations just referred to—that is, with the unqualified rejection of what claims to be the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments—I find myself in entire agreement. I do not and cannot believe either that Christ is in the water of baptism, or that He is in the bread and wine of the Supper. But I am quite sure that the New Testament suggests a real presence and working of Christ in the celebration of the sacraments, when they are celebrated as they originally were, and were always intended to be, in penitence and faith. It is not a presence in the elements, but a presence in the sense of the elements, and to the intent signified by them. It is not a presence which is explained by transubstantiation or by consubstantiation; both these

theories are meaningless answers to meaningless questions. It is not a presence before which we must simply stand with minds paralysed, as if mental paralysis were identical with adoration, or even with the sense of the mysterious. What the New Testament suggests, and what experience confirms, is that when baptism is celebrated in penitence and faith Christ is present, not in the water, but in the sense signified by it—that is, in the power of His spirit to wash our sinful nature and to renew it to life in God; and that when the Supper is celebrated He is again present, really present, not indeed in the sacramental elements, but in the sense of them; that is, He is present as the Lord whose body was broken and His blood shed for men, present in the power of His atonement, present to be the meat and drink of the soul. If any one says that this reduces the elements to mere symbols, I entirely agree; they can never be anything else. But they are Christ's pledge of His real presence in the sense of the symbols, and it is this which gives the sacraments their place of honour in the Church. They are not explanations, or theories, but facts; they remind us that faith rests not on any doctrine or wisdom of men, but on the presence and the action of a redeeming God. When the Communion Sabbath comes, then, let us celebrate the Supper not with superstition which would fain be reverent, and not with embarrassment which would fain be rid of something so perplexing in a spiritual faith, but with solemn, joyous, grateful appropriation of the Lord who is present with us, and who still gives Himself to us in the virtue of that sacrifice in which He once gave Himself for us. There is no true Church in which the soul is not nourished on a

present Christ, and that Christ the very one whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for us. This is what the Sacrament declares.)

4. Finally, the ideal Church of early days had this mark: they continued stedfastly in the prayers. The expression implies public and stated prayers: they had such in the temple, and the custom was born again in the Church. Prayer became a new thing when it became prayer in the name of Jesus, prayer prompted by the contemplation of Jesus and by faith in Him. On the one hand, Jesus was an inspiration to prayer: men could ask God for all they saw in Him—for part in His purity, His obedience, His faith, His patience, His victory. On the other hand, Jesus was a limit to prayer: men could not ask, as children of God, exemption from experiences which He was not spared; they could not ask to have no poverty, no misunderstanding, no weariness, no cross. They could only present in Jesus' name prayers which He would present in their name; they could ask everything to which He would say, Amen, but nothing else. It is a mark of the true Church to continue stedfastly in such prayers, to know that its life must be fed from heavenly springs, and to cherish its communications with God. Dr. Chalmers says that the reason why ministers fail in their work, when they do fail, is not that they do not preach, or visit, or study, but that they do not pray. They go to do by themselves alone what no man can do unless God is with him. Every minister who knows anything knows that this witness is true. But it is true of congregations and of individual Christians exactly as it is of ministers. The life to which the Church is called in Christ is a life which it cannot live alone. It can only address itself to it as it is uplifted and

strengthened by contact with God. Yet who could tell whether our inability to pray, or our unwillingness, is greater, an inability and unwillingness all the more astonishing when we consider how much we need and how much God in Christ has to give. How many of us hold on so earnestly to the sense of the prayers in church that we can even add a sympathetic Amen? Is there any note of the ideal Church in which more of our Churches would be found wanting than this—they continued stedfastly in the prayers?

Luke tells us some of the consequences which attended the possession of these striking notes, and it is worth while to mention them in closing. One was *fear:* fear fell upon every soul. This is Luke's token of the presence of the supernatural. A church in which men are not awed by the unquestionable presence of God will never be a power in the world. Another was *joy:* they did eat their meat with gladness. There are family meals spoiled by low spirits, bad temper, sullenness; and nothing will drive these miseries away but a part in Christ and in the new life of His Church. This will brighten the very meals we eat, and there are unhappy homes that will never be made happy by anything else. The last is *increase:* the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. Only the Lord can do it; and in a Church devoted to the testimony of the Apostles, to brotherly love, to adoring worship in which it appropriates the present Redeemer, and to fervent prayer, we have the conditions in which His power works. Let us pray for these things, and that God may make us, more than we have ever been, representative of that early Church, His sanctuary and His witnesses in a world which needs the Gospel as much as ever.

## A CHOSEN GENERATION.

"Beloved of God, called to be saints."—ROMANS I. 7.

THIS is Paul's description of the Church at Rome, the address upon his letter. The address upon a letter naturally consists of something which will guide the bearer to those for whom it is meant; it gives their names, or their business, or the place at which they live. Probably the bearer of this letter to Rome would have to seek out its recipients in the Jewish quarter; for though the Church was mainly Gentile, like every primitive Church it originated among the Jews, and only by degrees became quite independent of them. The Jewish quarter was poor and squalid, and even among its poor and squalid inhabitants the Christians held an inconspicuous place. When Paul came to Rome himself, a few years later, the representatives of his people either knew nothing or affected to know nothing of the new sect except that it was everywhere spoken against. But to Paul its external circumstances and its repute in the world were nothing; he saw not the outward appearance but the reality: to him it consisted of persons who could be addressed in this wonderful style, "Beloved of God, called to be saints". Beloved of God—what a rock to lean upon! Called to be saints—what a height to aspire to!

It is chiefly about the second I wish to speak at present—our calling to be saints. It is necessary to

notice that it *is* the second, and that it depends upon the first. It is as the objects and possessors of God's love that we are called with so high a calling. If we stood alone and unsupported in the world we should not dare to lift our eyes or our hearts so high. Many of us never think of it because we have not taken to ourselves that on which it depends. But the Gospel has come to us, and the very meaning of the Gospel is that we are not alone in the world. God is here, Christ is here, the Atonement is here, the gift of the Holy Spirit is here, and they are all here for us. They are all here, bringing into our hearts the assurance of the redeeming love of God; and as that love, incredible at first, becomes real and ever more real to our wondering spirits, a new world rises before our eyes in its marvellous light. A day begins to dawn for us that we had never hoped for. Out of the darkness, confusion, weakness, and despair that overlay our life, something begins to shine clear, steady, hopeful, inspiring—something which is as incredible at first as the love of God, yet which may fill us at last with as deep and grateful a joy—our high calling in Christ Jesus. This is what the love of God makes possible for us and puts within our reach. Those who know that they are God's beloved know also that in consequence of being so they are called to be saints. To be saints is not now a dream or a madness; with the love of God beneath us it is our calling. In other words, it is at once a clear duty, and a sure and glorious hope.

The text has only two words in it—*called* and *saints*—and to get into the heart of it we must explore them both. It is best to begin with the second, so that we

have two main questions to answer. First, What is meant by *saints?* Second, What is meant further when saints are regarded as such in virtue of *a call*, or as saints *by vocation?*

1. What is meant by *saints?* It is easy to answer the question formally. Saints means holy people, and in Scripture this means people belonging to God. When Paul speaks of Christians as called to be saints, he means that they are called to be His. The negative side of the idea is, "Ye are not your own"; the positive side of it is, "You are God's, you are *His* people, His representatives in the world". The oldest and perhaps the profoundest way in which religion is conceived in the Bible is as a covenant between God and man. The covenant has to be made. It has to be instituted by God, and entered into by man. Before it is made, God and man, so to speak, stand apart; God is there and man is here, and there is a sense in which both are frustrated. God is excluded from the life of the world, and man knows that the life he lives in himself —the natural secular life—is not eternal or Divine, a life which is life indeed. But when God draws near to us in His redeeming love, and enters into covenant with us in Christ, there is a real union of the human and the Divine; God fulfils Himself in the world through us, and we in our mortal life, with all its imperfections and failures, represent not our own cause or interest in the world but His. In the great city to which this letter was sent there were men to be found representing the most diverse interests, pleasure, pride, business, literature, art, science, law, government; but amidst its thronging myriads the Apostle's heart was pledged to the little company which represented, however

unworthily, the cause and interest of God the Redeemer. It is they who are in his mind when he says, "called to be saints".

We should not pass this point without saying: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us". Is it not wonderful, when we think of what we have been, that God should call *us* to be *His?* to live in union and communion with Him, and to stand for Him in the world? Is it not wonderful that in His condescension He should so trust and honour us?

If we ask how we are to aim at carrying out our calling to be *God's* people, it is part of its very greatness that there is no short and easy answer. Of course we can say that *God's* people must be a distinct people in the world; in some way or other they must be recognizedly and even separately His. But if we ask in what way, we find that any definite answer invariably breaks down at some point. In the course of Christian history there have been two great and typical attempts made to determine the kind of separateness which belongs or ought to belong to the saints as the people of God. The first is the Roman Catholic, which may be said to proscribe the world as a whole, to excommunicate nature and society, and to renounce, as inconsistent with the calling of the saint, the common relations and duties of life. Only a person who goes out of the world altogether and who lives in a hermitage or a monastery, renouncing property, family ties, and individual will, is a "religious," and may become a "saint". On this view the saints are only a class of Christians, a very small class, to whose calling the others are sacrificed; for the others must be more in

the world than their own needs would require in order to maintain the saints as well as themselves. This conception was certainly not the one in Paul's mind. He did not think of some Christians as called to be saints, and of others—of the great mass, indeed—as condemned to be content with some lower life; on the contrary, he writes, "to *all* that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints"; to him a saint and a Christian are the same thing. Every person whom the love of God touches is called to be His and completely His; and a separation from the world which is not in its full extent possible for every Christian is not that on which our calling to be saints depends.

The other type of separateness which has been illustrated in history may without injustice be called the evangelical one, if we use that term in its conventional rather than its New Testament meaning. It proscribes the world, not as a whole, like the Roman Catholic view, but piecemeal—in such and such parts and aspects of it as are judged by earnest Christians to be inconsistent with devotion to God. It says, not of the world as a whole, but of some things in it, "Touch not, taste not, handle not"; and it makes of the corresponding abstentions the badge of the people of God. When the great evangelical revival of the eighteenth century took place, it was accompanied with a conception of the saints' calling, or of the duty of God's people, of this kind. For those who took this calling seriously, there could be no dancing, no novel reading, no card parties, no theatre going: these things were all of the world, not of God, and those who took part in them could claim to be God's people no longer. Doubtless this judgment, for those who first framed

it and made it the rule of their own life, was sound enough. I do not wish to suggest that it has nothing in it worth thinking of now. Who will question that if we were in earnest with our calling to be saints such things would have a different complexion and a different proportion in some of our lives from that which they have at present? Nevertheless, to try to fulfil the saint's calling, simply by observing such abstentions as the circumstances of one particular age or one particular revival have pronounced obligatory, is futile. Experience condemns it as unequivocally as it does the Roman Catholic plan. When it has its perfect work, it does not produce the New Testament saint, but a character conventional, ungrounded, inconsistent, ineffective, and insincere.

But what other way, it may be asked, is left? The answer is that the New Testament way is left; and that it can be characterized intelligibly enough for anyone who wishes to make trial of it. Perhaps it may be said of it generally that the separateness from the world which it implies is not the means to saintliness, but the manifestation or result of it. Saintliness is not produced by separation; it is expressed in separateness, but it is produced by the love of God. All the separation which is required will be apparent in lives in which the love of God is the supreme and all-embracing motive; but separations which have another motive or have an end in themselves are essentially unsound. It is possible, I think, to indicate positively the characteristics of the life of the saint as a life determined throughout by the love of God in Christ; and it is only as we succeed in doing so that we do justice to the New Testament view.

It is a life of inner unity and consistency—the life of the man who can say at last, "This one thing I do". Much of the sin and misery of common life is literally dissipation. We do this and do that, are busy here and there, but our energies do not converge upon anything; we do not know what we are doing. This is one of the things which impresses many with the futility of life, and makes them cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity". But it disappears from the life of those in whom the redeeming love of God absorbs all good motives into itself and dominates everything. And it is a mark of the true saint to have the assurance that nothing in his life is vain, and that God from whom it all comes is using it all.

Further, the life of the saint is one in which perfect freedom and full responsibility are combined. There is no law laid down for the saint beforehand: there is no such thing as statutory obedience in his life, whether the statutes be conceived as Divine or human. Under God, or rather under the consciousness of the redeeming love of God, and of all it has done for him, the saint is a law to himself. Remember that other expression: "beloved of God". The whole of Christianity, all that is meant by the calling to be a saint, is in that; but everybody has to find out what it involves for himself, in the peculiar relations and conditions of his own life. He has to say to himself, "Here I stand, encompassed by the love of God—not my own, but His. Here I stand, believing that my life is dear to Him, and that through it His will and purpose are to be fulfilled in the world. Here I stand, under the constraint of the atoning death of Jesus, and the gift of His Holy Spirit—not my own, I repeat, but His.

It is out of this conviction, out of the sense of obligation involved here, that my whole life must flow. It is only what does come, freely yet irresistibly, spontaneously yet with a necessity leaving me no alternative, out of this sense of obligation, which belongs to my calling as a saint or fulfils it." In one word, what makes the saint is responsibility freely faced in the sense of the love of God. Naturally we shrink from responsibility. Either we are self-willed, which virtually means that we deny that there is such a thing as responsibility, or we are timid, and glad to have some one relieve us of our most exacting responsibility by telling us what our duty is. The Romanist can put it on his spiritual director; the Protestant can evade it by being conventional, and doing what other people do; but it is impossible to fulfil the calling of the saint on such cheap terms. To fulfil that calling we must realize that we are not under law but under grace, and that it is all between ourselves and God. We must face our circumstances—which for us are the world—ourselves, in the full sense of the love which God has to us; and we must decide on our own responsibility what we have to do or to abstain from doing, what we have to resign or to keep, if we would abide in that love, and prove ourselves not our own, but His. In truth, there is no difference in this respect between a man and a saint. It is responsibility which makes a man; and the saint is just a man who takes the whole of life's responsibilities upon his conscience—*as one beloved of God.*

The life of the saint, according to the New Testament, will also be marked by moral originality. He has been redeemed from all that is conventional in

conduct—from the vain conversation, we should say the empty life, received by tradition from the fathers. He is not the repetition of other men, nor the observer of alien rules. To live under a rule, as people live in a monastic order, is the very antithesis of the saint's calling. Every act of the saint is an act of creation in the moral world. The like of it was never seen before. No law prescribed it, yet once it is done we see it is supremely right. The great illustration of this is Jesus Himself, the only person who is spoken of in the New Testament as "the saint (or holy one) of God". Nothing strikes us more in Jesus than His incalculableness, the startling newness and freshness of all His words and deeds. Who could imagine Him living under a monastic rule? Who could imagine Him observing the moral conventions of any denomination or sect? Yet He is the only inspiration of the saint's life, and He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. But who does follow except the man who in the sense of God's redeeming love is no longer a slave but a son, and does in a way which is all his own the will of the Father?

To add one further characteristic: the life of the saint is morally effective. It tells upon the world as genuine goodness tells, and the will and purpose of God are fulfilled by it. The saint is a person living in the consciousness of the love of God, and everything that is in him, so far as he is a saint, is in correspondence with that love. His holiness, that which makes him a saint, must be in correspondence with it. There must be something redemptive in it, something which appeals to and wins men. There is such a thing as holiness which is not inspired by the sense of God's

love, but by selfishness, or by the desire to put God under obligations to us; and such holiness can always be detected as a sham by this—it has no redeeming power. It does not touch the sinful, and waken in their unhappy hearts a longing to share in it; it does not stretch out helpful hands of which they can take hold. But those who are called to be saints are called to be holy *as God is holy*—that God whose redeeming power has lifted them up and set so great a hope before them; and if they are fulfilling their calling, then all through their life men will feel the presence of God the Redeemer. Holiness, the character of saints, of those who are God's, is born of the sense of God's love; and it brings the sense of that love in all its redeeming power, and in all the new hopes which it inspires, to those who behold it.

2. The greatness of this life may well seem too great, and, indeed, we may hear professedly Christian people saying, "Of course I don't pretend to be a saint". How odd such a sentence would look in the New Testament, where the saints and the Christians are the same thing. "I don't pretend to be a saint" can only mean "I don't take the Christian religion quite seriously". It is as if a man said, "I don't mean to deny that there is something in what is said of the love of God, and the atonement for sin, and the gift of the Spirit; but to take it all in simple earnest, as literal truth, and to take it with all the obligations this would imply—no, I certainly don't do that, and don't think of doing so". Could anything be more profane than to respond in this equivocal way to the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us? Better be irreligious outright than mock with this deliberate

want of earnestness the redeeming love of God. But sometimes special causes discourage us from taking our calling to be saints with seriousness and hope. There is the past which we can never forget, which haunts us with shame. Yes, but God knows it better than we, and yet His love has come to us in Christ, and there is nothing too hard for it to deal with. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea." There is the ever-present sin which still defeats us—which surprises and humbles us even while we look to the love of God. But to speak truly, is it not when we look away from God's love that we fall? We dare not say that the evil that is in us is stronger than He; it is written, "He will subdue their iniquities". Then there is the discouraging wisdom of this world, what those who have lived without God call the teaching of experience. It is needless and hopeless (it tells us) to aim so high; you must be sensible; you must remember what human nature is both in yourself and in other people, and not expect too much from it. To be a saint may be a calling in the New Testament, but it is not a calling in the streets of a modern city, and the less lofty your language, the less absurd you will appear. Of course those who do not believe in God and His love cannot speak in any other strain. If there is no God, or if we are not beloved of God, then we are not called to be His, or called to be saints. All I would say of this worldly wisdom may be said in the Apostle's word: "This persuasion cometh not of Him who *calleth* you".

As against all such discouraging thoughts, let us turn to the final and conclusive encouragement which

we have in the other word of the text—*called*. What does it mean to say that we are *called* to be saints, or are saints in virtue of a *call?* When we remember that for the Apostle it is always *God* who calls, we may surely say such things as these. First, our calling to be saints is not a matter of *indifference*. There are things in the world which are of little consequence: it hardly matters what our relation to them is. But a Divine calling cannot be one of such things. Remember, it is God who calls. He calls through the Gospel; He calls through the life and words, through the death and resurrection of His Son; He calls through the gift and ministry of His Spirit; and He never calls us to anything else or less than this—to be saints. It cannot be a matter of no consequence how we respond to such a call. Further, in view of God's call we can say that when we aspire to be saints, or to be His people in this world, it is not a matter of *presumption* on our part. It is not a life for which we volunteer, or on which we adventure of our own motion, or which we have to carry through on our own resources; it is a life to which we have a Divine summons, and that summons is our justification. Paul in the first sentence of this epistle describes himself as "called to be an Apostle". No one could become an Apostle just by wishing or resolving to be one: he required to have a call from God. It is the same with being a Christian —that is, a saint. It would be presumption if we looked at it as an adventure, but when God calls us the presumption is to hold back. Most important of all: to have a calling to be saints is to be assured that the issue of the life to which we are pledged is not a matter of *uncertainty*. We can face it not only with

humility but with hope. In his history of the early church, Dr. Rainy sets this down as the great change which came upon the world with the appearance of Christianity: the life of goodness became an assured career. Before the Gospel came, despair had fallen upon the ancient world; society had abandoned the very idea and hope of goodness; "deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell". But suddenly a change came. Men appeared in that lost world with an infinite hope in their hearts—an assured and triumphant hope, to be holy as God is holy; and it spread from heart to heart till in the Christian Church a new people of God became visible upon earth, a society which with all its imperfections was a communion of saints. What was it that made the change? It was the sense of *a Divine call* that had come to men. And how had it come? It came through the revelation of the love of God. If we are ignorant of this, then any life like that which the saints set before them must appear fantastic and unreal. But if we know what that word means, "beloved of God," it will open to us the meaning of the other, "called to be saints". And that brings us back to the point from which we started. It is because we have this to lean upon that we dare aspire so high. It is only as we lean upon it that our calling to be God's becomes credible, practicable, real. They are the two most wonderful things in the world, the most incredible to start with, the most humbling, the most uplifting, the most Divine—"beloved of God," "called to be saints". In the celebration of the Supper to-day we have been reassuring ourselves of the first. We have been taking the redeeming love of God to ourselves again in all its fulness, the love manifested

in the passion of our Lord; shall we not take it also in its infinite obligation, in its infinite hope? For to be the people of God in the world is for those who are so called to it not only a duty but a hope. It is a thing to lift up our hearts to with humility, assurance, and joy. And when we are discouraged by the remembrance of what we have been or what we are, let us remember that it is not on this our calling rests; it rests on the solemn and wonderful truth that we are beloved of God. Underneath all our sinfulness and weakness, underneath our past, our present, and our future, lies a finished work of Christ, a great deep of love on which our wrecked and stranded lives can be floated into the assurance of hope, and filled with all the fulness of God. We cannot speak of these things as they should be spoken of. We cannot fix our hearts on all that is involved in them as they should be fixed. But as we think of how God loves us and of how He has shown His love—as we clasp these gracious words to our hearts and claim our inheritance in them: *beloved of God, called to be saints*—we can say, "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, and made us a kingdom, even priests to His God and Father: to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

## LOYALTY TO THE SAINTS.

'If I had said, I will speak thus; Behold, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children."—PSALM LXXIII. 15.

THE Old Testament does not often speak of children of God, yet no one would have any difficulty in understanding to whom the Psalmist here refers. In the Book of Deuteronomy the Israelites generally are described by this title: "ye are children to Jehovah your God; ye shall not follow any heathen custom". But even in ancient times it had become plain that they were not all Israel that were of Israel; within the wide circle of the nation there was a narrower circle of those who really were what it was called to be. It is this narrower circle, the true people of God, who are here described as the generation of His children. A similar expression is found in the twenty-fourth Psalm. The Psalmist asks: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?" "He that hath clean hands," he answers, "and a pure heart: who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, and hath not sworn deceitfully." Such he assures of the blessing of God, and then proceeds: "This is the generation of them that seek Him, that seek Thy face, O God of Jacob". In other words, this is the generation of God's children. Substantially also, in the last half of the Book of Isaiah, it is this Israel within Israel which is meant by the Servant of the Lord. In spite

of apostasy and all its painful consequences, there ever remains in Israel a seed to serve God, a spiritual succession of men and women true to Him. They have a character of their own; they have hopes and convictions peculiar to themselves; they form a party and an interest distinct from everything else in the world.

This was not only true when the Psalms were written; it is true to-day. At this moment, there is such a thing in the world as the generation of God's children, the spiritual successors of those to whom the Psalmist refers; they inherit the same hopes, and represent the same ideals and beliefs. It is a great matter to recognize this. For one thing, it is an important part of our moral security to have our place among God's children. They alone are perpetuated from age to age: the cause with which they are identified is the only one against which time does not prevail. For another, it is a great test of the soundness of our judgment in spiritual things when we find ourselves in agreement with them. "I love," says one of the fathers of the Scottish Church, "I love to walk in the steps of the flock"; that is, I love to find myself at one with the generation of God's children. The individual cannot but have misgivings if he feels inclined to set his own wavering judgment, his own unstable faith, his own brief and limited experience, against the age-long experience and the immemorial convictions of the people of God. It is one of God's warnings that he is on a wrong track when he finds himself at variance with them. To dissent from them is somehow or other to be disloyal to them. "If I say, I will speak thus"—that is, I will indulge in sceptical, unbelieving, God-disowning thoughts and

words—" behold, I shall be a traitor to the generation of thy children ".

The one mark of the children of God which never varies is that they believe in Him. From generation to generation they perpetuate the sublime tradition of faith. In various modes, through all sorts of discouragement, they look unceasingly to Him, believing that He is, and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him. The Old Testament does not contain any doctrines, and this faith is the whole of its religion. It is the element in the life of our race which ennobles it and makes it great. It is that which has inspired every kind of virtue—patience, self-denial, self-sacrifice, superiority to the senses and to the world in which they live. Could there be a more fatal symptom of a bad heart than that one should be a traitor to those who represent this great cause upon the earth ? Could there be a surer sign that a way of feeling, thinking, speaking, or acting was wrong than this, that it separated a man from those who in all ages had stood for God and for faith in Him ?

It will enable us to appreciate this more truly if we consider some of the ways in which faith in God is manifested, and in which we may prove untrue to it.

1. Faith in God implies *faith in His government of the world.* This is the particular aspect of faith with which the Psalmist is here concerned. No doubt it belongs to the nature of faith that it should be tried ; if there were not appearances against it, it would not be faith ; it would be sight. The contrary appearances are what challenges faith and puts it to the proof, and it is in asserting itself against them that faith shows its genuineness and strength. It is manifest that the

Psalmist had had more than enough to try *his* faith in the Divine government. When he looked abroad upon the earth, it was as though God had abandoned it, or rather as though there were no God at all. He saw all power and prosperity in the hands of the wicked, and he saw this power and prosperity generate in them an arrogant and godless confidence which language almost fails to describe. "They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression: they speak loftily. They have set their mouth in the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth . . . and they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" It is the reign of atheism at once practical and theoretical—not confined to the disregard of God's will in action, but advancing impiously to flout the very idea that He knows or cares for what is done on earth. When such a situation lasts long, it undoubtedly brings with it the temptation to doubt the government of God. Even believing men like the Psalmist find sceptical thoughts rising involuntarily in their minds. What is the use of trying to be good? What profit is it to serve God? It gains nothing. It exempts from nothing. "Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." Goodness is a mere futility which in the life of the world does not count at all. Such is the hot, impatient, despairing speech which bursts from this good man's lips as he looks round him on the moral confusions of earth, and the seeming absence of God. But all of a sudden it is checked. The "behold" in the text reveals how he was startled by the thought which flashed into his

mind. What, it was suggested to him, does the indulgence of this sceptical temper mean? It means that I am betraying the cause for which the children of God have fought the good fight from generation to generation, that I am deserting the forlorn hope of the good to side with the enemies of God and man. God forbid! Be my soul with the saints, and shall my mind cherish thoughts, shall my lips speak words, that are disloyal to their faith, their hopes, their sacrifices? To choose your creed is to choose your company, and the feeling that such scepticism would range him in base opposition to the Israel of God is the first thing which rallies the Psalmist again to assert his faith.

Surely the lesson of this is plain. The things that tried the Psalmist's faith have not yet vanished from the world. Those who can form any conception of what is involved in the government of the Armenians and the Macedonians by the Turks — those who followed through weary years the indescribable barbarities perpetrated systematically by a so-called Christian government on the Congo—those who realize what is involved in the position and influence of the liquor trade in this country—those who see how human beings are dehumanized alike by the excessive wealth and the extreme poverty which our civilization seems to engender: all these may well be tempted to wonder whether God does govern the world, or whether He cares at all for what happens here. But let no one think that the trials of faith are arguments for unbelief. No: they are trumpet calls for witnesses for God; for soldiers, for martyrs, for men and women who will fight God's battle against all odds, and though they

die fighting die assured of victory at last. All the hope of the world lies in them, not in the cynical or sceptical who say, How doth God know?

And in our own private concerns, as well as in the larger outlook upon life, this temptation has to be encountered and overcome. There are people who seem haunted by misfortune—"plagued," as the Psalmist says, "all day long, and chastened every morning". They are not bad people either; they may be sincere, well-meaning, devout. For a while, they bear up against their troubles, and ascribe them to chance or to some mismanagement of their own; but as courage fails they are tempted to say, The strife is useless; there is no care taken by God of human life, or we could never fare thus. But to speak so is to desert the faith of all the good. It is to desert the conviction which has made numberless lowly, suffering, and disappointed lives beautiful with a beauty beyond that of earthly success. It is to separate ourselves from those to whose patience and hope all that is finest in human character is due. Surely this is the proof that it is a great mistake. Surely the true course is to remain loyal to the generation of God's children, and to add something of our own to the most priceless treasure of our race—the inherited conviction that God is everywhere present in the life of man, directing it to Divine ends, and in spite of disconcerting appearances making all things work together for good to them that love Him. This is the patience and the faith of the saints; do not, however you are tried, betray or belie it, but by your own faith and patience set a new seal to its truth.

2. Faith in God's government of the world is what

the Psalmist is fighting for, but faith in God has other aspects. It involves *faith in the authority of His law.* It means the conviction that there is an eternal distinction between right and wrong which can never be explained away. It means that the right is something absolutely binding—not something to be deduced from other things essentially variable, and therefore liable to vary with them; and that the wrong is in the same way absolutely to be repelled. There are, as we know, philosophers who refuse to accept any such distinction. On the ground that the moral consciousness in man has developed, they hold that all definitions of right and wrong are relative; things are right at one stage which would be wrong at another; they are right for one man when they would be wrong for another; a right and wrong which are not to be argued about, but merely recognized—in which there can be no room for adjustment whatever, but only submission to the absolute will of God—these are ideas which the subtle modern intelligence has outgrown. Nor is it only philosophers or professional moralists who speak thus. A vast proportion of the general literature which deals with human life takes this sceptical attitude. It takes it avowedly and of set purpose. It lays itself out to show that the man who asserts the absolute authority of what he calls the law of God—or rather of what the generation of God's children have always recognized as His law—is a dull and narrow-minded man, with no flexibility of intellect, no sensitiveness to the multiplicity of nature. He needs to be mentally emancipated, and once he is, his moral austerity will see that it has no ground.

I will refer to two instances of this, from quite

different quarters of the moral world. Every one who has been brought up in the Christian Church knows the law of personal purity which is constituted by the teaching and the life of Jesus. He knows that this is the will of God, even our sanctification, that every one should keep his body in purity and honour. But he will very soon discover that there are philosophies of morality which cannot vindicate and do not promulgate any such law. An ostentatiously anti-Christian writer, like the late Sir Leslie Stephen, frankly acknowledges that those thinkers who have sought to explain morality on utilitarian grounds have shown as a rule a strong tendency to relaxed ideas on this vital subject. And how many novelists there are, exhibiting their criticism of life in all languages, who seem to have it as their one motive to show that there is nothing absolute in the seventh commandment. A man is to be true to his wife, naturally; but it is a poor kind of truth to sacrifice to his legal obligations to one woman the genuine love for another in which his true being would attain its full realization. What should we say when we encounter ideas of this kind, in philosophy or in literature, in cruder or in subtler forms? Let them be met on their own ground, by all means; let bad philosophy be confuted by good; let the inadequacy of such theories to explain the actual moral contents of life be made clear; but before everything, let the soul purge itself from every shadow of complicity in them in the indignant words of the Psalm, "If I spoke thus, I should be false to the generation of God's children." I should desert those who have done more than all others to lift the life of man from the natural to the spiritual level. I should betray the cause of

Christ and of all the saints to strengthen the cause, at best of David Hume, at worst of the brute in man.

The second illustration will seem to many frivolous by comparison, but that may itself be a proof of its seriousness. The fourth commandment is, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy—that is, remember the day of rest to keep it unto God. We are all aware that this is a subject on which there is a remarkable laxity or even an entire absence of conscience among ordinarily good people. The day is remembered, certainly; it is a day off, and in that sense is not likely to be overlooked; but it is not, as the commandment requires, kept unto God. It is often kept to ourselves —to amusement, to indolence, to idle reading. Those who believe in having a day off once a week are hardly at liberty to say that the fourth commandment is annulled by the higher principle which claims every day for God. It is common ground between them and the saints that to make one day in seven exceptional is an excellent thing, and the only question that remains to be settled is what exceptional use of it is the best which can be made. Of course this is left for decision to every man's conscience: let no man judge you in respect of a Sabbath, as St. Paul says. But it *is* conscience which is to judge—conscience, and not the caprice of the man whose real thought is that this is a matter in which conscience has nothing to say. Once let conscience speak, and the ancient law which claims the day peculiarly for rest and for God will soon assert its authority. If you are in doubt as to what is or is not legitimate on the exceptional day of the week, call up to your mind the best people you have known, the generation of God's children,

and let their conscience and practice weigh with you. Distrust yourself if your conduct makes you disloyal to them. Do not speak about the Sabbath, or if you prefer to call it so, the Sunday—do not speak about what Christians rejoice in as the Lord's Day—in a way which betrays the high interests of the soul to which the day has been devoted from the beginning by those who best knew God. Be true to the good. Be loyal to those on whom God has set His seal, and count such loyalty an honour higher far than that of any reputation for liberality of mind. Who is so likely to be in the wrong, on a question of this kind, as the man who finds himself in opposition to the saints of all time?

3. Once more, faith in God implies *faith in His promises:* it implies in the last resort faith in the greatest of His promises, the promise of eternal life. This is directly suggested by the context. True, it was not at first seen by believers in God. The God whom faith apprehends is so great that all that is involved in faith cannot be apprehended in an instant. But it comes into view by degrees. As the Scottish father whom I quoted at the beginning has said, "Eternity is wrapt up and implied in every truth of religion". A religious life, or a life of faith, means at bottom life in God; and life in God is life over which death has no power. The Psalmist had attained to this truth, and gives expression to it in words of deathless sublimity and beauty. "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee; Thou hast holden my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth

that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." This is the full compass of faith in God—faith with its amplest range of vision, and speaking in its clearest tones. This is what ultimately characterizes the generation of God's children.

But how few there are who can naturally speak thus! How difficult it is for us, when we use such words in our praise, to feel that we have any right to them! Our own faith in immortality is often languid, often in abeyance. Sometimes the idea eludes us; sometimes we do not know whether it is a hope or a dread. We are painfully sensible of all the appearances which are against it. We feel our kinship with all the other life in the world, which is not immortal. We feel how hard, nay how impossible it is to draw a line across it at any particular point, and to say that all that is on one side is mortal, while all that is on the other only passes through death to enter into immortality. The statement once made by Lord Lister at the British Association—that anæsthetics suspend the functions of vegetable as well as of animal life—in its simple truth makes the blood run cold. It is all one thing, we seem to feel, in plant, in animal, in man; it springs from one fountain, it runs one course, it comes to one end. No wonder the mediaeval proverb says, "Three physicists, two atheists"; the whole analogy of nature is against immortality. When we think of the immense mass of human intelligence which is now being trained in the sciences that use only physical categories, we can understand the immense pressure under which faith has to assert itself, the hardness of the battle it has to fight. Imagination

is chilled and appalled in such an atmosphere, and faith is benumbed where it is not killed outright.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel the difficulties which are thus created for faith, and another to succumb to them. There are two ways in which faith when hardly pressed can react against this trying environment. One is to recall the fact, that true as the disconcerting phenomena referred to may be, they are not the whole truth. A man's life is one the functions of which can be suspended by an anæsthetic just like those of a dog or a plant: no one can question that. But a man's life is also one which can raise itself to the immortal faith of this Psalm: "Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterward receive me unto glory". This sublime faith in God belongs as much to the realities of human life as the insensibility induced by chloroform. It is not only as true as the other, it is far more true in this sense, that it marks what human nature is when it has really reached its height. This is the self-expression of man when he comes to the full stature of manhood. A man under chloroform is not a man; no one breathes the native air of the soul, no one speaks its native language, no one moves in the liberty for which it was born, till he can make these words his own. It is of those who speak thus and of them only that we can say, "This is the generation of them that seek Thee, the generation of Thy children, O God of Jacob". And the second way to react against sceptical thoughts about immortality is the one which is directly given in the text. When such thoughts press upon us, when the arguments that death ends all seem conclusive and we have nothing to urge against them, when the sense of our mortality

is importunate and we do not know how to mitigate or to evade it, let us say to ourselves: If I *yield* to such impressions, I separate myself from the generation of God's children. In a question of spiritual import I take the opposite side from all who have been distinguished by spiritual insight and by knowledge of God. I become disloyal to the Psalmist and to all who have made his words their own—disloyal to Jesus, and to the faith in which He lived and died—disloyal to the martyrs—disloyal to all who have fallen asleep in Jesus in the sure and blessed hope of a glorious resurrection. Is it nothing to be on the other side in such circumstances? Is it nothing to be aware that the great spirits of our race are on the side we are abandoning? And for whom? For whom, I say, not for what; for again we must remember that to choose our creed is to choose our company. Can we appeal to names on the other side that command an equal reverence? No one, I fancy, has ever argued more subtly against immortality than Hume: but what has Hume contributed to the spiritual life of the world that he should be counted an authority at all? Who would weigh his negative inferences, whatever the weight of logic behind them, against the insight and conviction of this Psalm, against the assurance of Jesus, against the struggling yet ever triumphant faith of the generation of God's children? None who would be loyal to the best that man has been. None who have generosity enough to comprehend the sudden emotion of this text: "If I spoke thus, behold, I should be a traitor to the generation of Thy children".

I will add one word of application to this interpretation of the text: Associate with God's children, and

let their convictions inspire yours ; frequent the church, and let the immemorial faith of all saints beget itself in you anew. It is one great service of the Church that it perpetuates the tradition of faith—that sublime voices like those of this Psalm are for ever sounding in it, waking echoes and Amens in our hearts—that characters and convictions of the highest type are generated in it, not by logic but by loyalty, not by argument but by sympathy with the good—deep calling unto deep. We need the common faith to sustain our individual faith ; we need the consciousness of the children of God in all ages to fortify our wavering belief in His government, His law and His promises. To be at home in the Church is to absorb this strength unconsciously. It is to be delivered from the shallows and miseries of a too narrow experience, and set afloat on the broad stream of Christian conviction which gathers impetus and volume with every generation the saints survive.

# DEGREES OF REALITY IN REVELATION AND RELIGION.

"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth.—1 JOHN v. 6 f.

THERE are three different connexions in which John emphasizes water and blood in a way resembling that which strikes us here. First, there are the two chapters in his Gospel—the third and the sixth—with their reference to the Christian sacraments. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves." In the sacraments of Baptism and the Supper, the water and the blood are symbolized, and their virtue is perpetuated for the Church. Then there is the singular passage in which an incident of the Passion is specially emphasized. "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and straightway there came out blood and water." That the evangelist attached some strange and extraordinary importance to this is apparent from the solemnity with which he attests it. "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe." And finally

there is the passage in the epistle which we have taken as a text.

The point emphasized in this last passage is that when we think of Jesus Christ the water and the blood are not to be separated : Jesus came, not in one only, but in the other also. The key to this puzzling statement is to be found in chapter four, at the third verse. There we read in our English Bibles, that every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God ; but as the margin of the Revised Version tells us, some ancient authorities read, every spirit which annulleth Jesus is not of God. *Annulleth* is the rendering of the Latin *solvit*, a word which occurs in all Latin manuscripts but one, and which points quite distinctly to a separation of elements in the being or experience of Jesus analogous to that which is forbidden here. In point of fact we know on other grounds that there were those who made such a separation. Among the contemporaries of John at Ephesus there was a prominent teacher called Cerinthus who taught, to put it so, that Jesus came with the water only. He held that all that was Divine in Jesus descended upon Him when He was baptized, and that all that He did in virtue of the power with which He was then invested was Divine. The new teaching which so impressed men with its authority—the words of eternal life by which the souls of men were quickened toward God—the mighty works which delivered men oppressed and enslaved by the devil : all these were Divine, but these only. Whatever was of God in Jesus, whatever constituted Him the Son of God, withdrew from Him as Calvary came near. The Son of God did not come through blood. The Christ did not really pass through

the degrading and squalid tragedy of the Crucifixion. He left the mere man Jesus, or perhaps a mere phantom, to undergo the passion; but all that was Divine was absent then. This is what John so emphatically denies. As against all such separations he protests that the Son of God came by water *and* by blood. That strange and moving incident at the cross reminds us of it. The sacraments are a perpetual witness to it. Something vital goes out of our religion if it is denied.

Possibly there are some who can hardly take the trouble to understand this: it seems to them so crazy, remote, and unreal that their minds refuse to attend to it. But this is a mistake. It raises an extremely serious question, a question never more keenly discussed than at this hour, though under other forms. It may be put somewhat in this fashion. We who are Christians believe that in Jesus Christ the love of God has been revealed for our salvation, and the question is, *What kind or degree of reality belongs to that love?* John's answer is emphatic. It is no less real than our own life and death; it is as real as blood. And the immediate inference is that the religion which is our response to this revelation must have a corresponding reality. Hence there are two subjects, or rather two aspects of one subject, suggested by this text; (1) the reality of God's redeeming love, (2) the reality of our response to it.

1. The reality of God's redeeming love. It is easy to puzzle the mind with questions about reality, especially where God is concerned. Every one has heard of the astronomer who swept the heavens with his telescope and found no trace of God. That is not very

disconcerting. We do not ascribe to God the same kind of reality as we do to the stars, and are not disappointed if the astronomer does not detect him as he might a hitherto unnoticed planet. M. Renan somewhere speaks of God as "the category of the ideal"; that is, he ascribes to God that kind of reality which belongs to the high thoughts, aspirations, and hopes of the mind. Certainly we should not disparage the ideal or its power, and still less should we speak lightly of those who devote themselves to ideals and cherish faith in them. But to redeem and elevate such creatures as we are, more is needed; and what the Apostle is so emphatic about is that God has come to save us not with the reality of ideals, but with the reality of all that is most real in the life we live on earth, in the battle we fight in the flesh, in the death that we die. He has come with the reality of blood. The Christian religion is robbed of what is most vital in it if the historical Christ and the historical passion cease to be the very heart of it.

Sometimes this robbery, by which the faith is ruined, is perpetrated on philosophical principles. The important thing in the Gospel, we are told, is the ethical principle of it—the idea that we must die to live, must sacrifice the lower life for the sake of the higher; grasp this, and everything else becomes indifferent. Jesus may have been the first to grasp it clearly, but it is not dependent on Him; and once we have clearly grasped it, we are not dependent on Him either. On the contrary, it enables us to understand Him, to appreciate what He has done for the common good, to assign Him His due place among the great men who have contributed to the enlightenment and uplifting of our race.

I say again, we have no need to disparage ethical principles and those who strive to regulate their lives by them; but the very meaning of the Gospel is that we have more than ethical principles, however true and lofty, to look to. We have the passion of the Son of God. I had rather preach with a crucifix in my hand and the feeblest power of moral reflection, than have the finest insight into ethical principles and no Son of God who came by blood. It is the pierced side, the thorn-crowned brow, the rent hands and feet, that make us Christians—these, and not our profoundest thoughts about the ethical constitution of the universe. "I write unto you, little children," says the author of this epistle, "because your sins are forgiven you." Where does the forgiveness of sins come from? Is there any ethical principle from which it can be deduced? Are there any fine ideas or combinations of ideas from which we can derive the assurance that there is in God—not in idea but in reality—a love more wonderful and powerful than sin, a love that bears it in all its crushing weight, and enables us to triumph over it? No, it is no principle or idea which yields an assurance like that. "Your sins are forgiven you *for His name's sake.*" It is through the passion of the Son of God, through the death that He died on the cross, and through nothing less awfully real, that such assurance establishes itself in the heart.

Sometimes, again, it is not philosophers but historians who lapse in this unfortunate direction. We are all familiar with what is known as historical criticism, and especially with its application to Scripture. We know that it has affected our estimate of many things, and that it has been attended in the Church with much

alarm and apprehensiveness as to its results. There is one way of meeting this situation—one way of attempting to soothe the apprehensions of timid Christians—with which also we are familiar, but which needs to be more seriously thought of in the light of this text. How often we hear it said, "All this nervousness and anxiety about the results of criticism is beside the mark. It is quite true that everything which claims to be historical is subject to criticism, and that any alleged historical fact may prove unable to stand critical tests; but why should anyone be spiritually perturbed for that? It has nothing to do with religion. Facts and faith move on different planes. They never touch. We may come to any conclusion whatever about facts without making the smallest difference to faith. Faith stands on its own basis. It does not depend on facts; it can assert itself in despite of them. It is sheer unbelief which inspires these fears." What are we to say to this line of argument?

If we agree with the Apostle we must say that it is false. The Christian religion, as he at least understood it, was not this pure and sublimated spirituality to which facts are indifferent. Nor is it so to Christians in general. It is saying little to say that the specious consolation just described never consoled anyone who was really alarmed. Indeed to most people it is so far from bringing consolation that they feel it is adding insult to injury. A sound instinct tells them what it means. It means that faith henceforth is to have the reality of ideas—of high and noble convictions or aspirations of our own—but not the reality of blood. And such faith, they know, is not real enough to overcome the world. We do not need to say that it

is atheism, but neither is it faith in God *through Him.*

In true Christianity, everything depends on the facts—on Jesus Christ who came by water and blood; not with the water only, but with the water and the blood. Our sound course is, not to say that no matter what comes of the facts the Christian faith is secure, but to point out the entire security of the facts on which that faith reposes. Consider, for example, the evidential value of the sacraments as it is suggested by this very passage. There is nothing in Christianity more primitive than the sacraments. They were celebrated universally in the Church before any part of the New Testament was written, and they still bear unequivocal witness to Him who came in the water and in the blood. Every one of the countless millions who from the day of Pentecost to this day has been baptized in the name of Jesus is a witness to the baptism of Jesus Himself, to His experience at the Jordan and its sequel in His Spirit-filled life. Every one who since the night on which He was betrayed has eaten the bread and drunk of the cup in the Lord's Supper is a witness to the reality of His Passion. These things cannot be shaken, and it is absurd to speak of them as if they could be, and leave our faith secure. Without them it could never have come into being, and would speedily cease to be. Without a historical foundation as real as life and death, preaching is vain and faith is vain: there is not a love of God known to us on which we can lean as Christians have leaned hitherto on the passion of their Lord.

2. Let us turn now to the other aspect of the truth: the reality of our response to God's love as manifested

in the life and death of Jesus. Such love claims an answer in kind. There must be an intensity in the religion corresponding to that of the revelation : there must be the reality of blood in both.

Every reader of the Gospel knows that nothing is so abhorrent to Jesus as a Laodicean attitude on the part of disciples. When He was on His way to Jerusalem, Luke tells us, "great multitudes followed Him ; and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple ". It was as though it tried His patience beyond endurance to be attended by multitudes who could not find it in their hearts to answer His passion with any corresponding passion of their own. He was going up to Jerusalem to die, and they were going up to gaze, perhaps to admire or to applaud, certainly not to share His cross. It is at the close of this passage that He says to these insipid followers, "Salt is good; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned ? It is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill : men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." What is salt ? What is the saline property in human character which makes it valuable and serviceable to Jesus, and the want of which makes Him pronounce on men the appalling sentence—"good for nothing"? It is the power of self-denial, of doing violence to nature and its impulses, of meeting the passion of Christ with responsive passion, of giving blood for blood. If it is not in men to do this, even in presence of the cross, Christ declares them "not fit for the Kingdom of God ".

It follows from this that no deliberate seeking of a

sheltered life is truly Christian. The Son of God came in blood. He faced the world as it was, the hour and the power of darkness; He laid down life itself in pursuance of His calling; and there must be something answering to this in a life which is genuinely Christian. Yet we cannot help seeing that in different ways this conclusion is practically evaded. It is evaded by those who aim at cultivating the Christian life solely in coteries, cliques, and conventions of like-minded people; by those whose spiritual concern is all directed inward, and whose ideal is rather the sanctification of the soul than the consecration of life to Christ. There are so few people who make holiness in any sense whatever the chief end of life that one shrinks from saying anything which might reflect on those who do pursue it, even in a mistaken sense; but who has not known promising characters fade away and become characterless, through making this mistake? Who does not know how easy it is to miss the Gospel type, the type of Jesus, and actually to present to the world, as though with his stamp upon it, a character insipid, ineffective, bloodless? Nothing has a right to bear His name that is not proved amid the actualities of life to have a passion in it like His own. But far oftener than by any mistaken idea of sanctification is Christ's claim for reality in religion evaded by mere selfishness. In how many homes is life narrowed to the circle of the domestic affections, and how often precisely such homes are thought of as among the happiest triumphs of the Christian religion! No one need undervalue the domestic affections: they are among the dearest and best gifts of God to man. But if life is shut up within them, as it often is, then no matter how amiable, how

refined, how pure, how happy they may be, it is a bloodless life. In many a happy family, which would be amazed to hear itself spoken of as unchristian, the conflicts of the world are ignored. The Lord's battle is going on all around it against pride, sensuality, greed, drunkenness, spurious patriotism; and they are not in it. There is no real response in their lives to that which Jesus was, did, and suffered. But *He* came by *blood;* He longs to see of the travail of His soul; and there is nothing to satisfy soul-travail in the blameless happy life of many so-called Christian homes. Their religion may be real, but it is not real enough for Him; it has no passion in it answering to the Passion of the Son of God who came in blood.

I can understand anyone seeing both aspects of the truth on which we have been dwelling, and the correspondence of the one to the other, and yet feeling unable to realize their connexion in experience. "I can see the passion of Jesus, and I acknowledge that it should evoke a responsive passion in me, but it does not. It is too far away. I apprehend it as a fact, but somehow it does not operate as a motive. Why is this, and what ought I to do?" The answer to such questions, I believe, is suggested by the next words of the Apostle: "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth". There is a point of mystery in all religion—not the point at which we know nothing, but the point at which we know everything and yet nothing happens—the point at which we are cast absolutely on God. But the mention of the Spirit reminds us that though the Christian experience depends absolutely upon God, it is not for that reason blankly mysterious. The Spirit is a witness; he takes

the things of Christ and shows them to us, and under his showing they become present, real, and powerful. This is his work—to make the past present, the historical eternal, the inert vital. When the Spirit comes, Christ is with us in all the reality of His life and Passion, and our hearts answer to His testimony. We read the Gospel, and we do not say, He spoke these words of grace and truth, but He speaks them. We do not say, He received sinners and ate with them; but, He receives sinners and spreads a table for them. We do not say, He prayed for His own; but, He ever liveth to make intercession for us. We do not even say, He came in blood; but, He is here, clothed in His crimson robe, in the power of His Passion, mighty to save. Have we not had this witness of the Spirit on days we can recall? Have we not had it in listening to the word of God this very day? We know what it is to grieve the Spirit; we know also what it is to open our hearts to Him. Let us be ready always to open our hearts to His testimony to the Son of God—to Jesus Christ who came with the water and with the blood; and as the awful reality of the love of God in Christ is sealed upon them, let us make answer to it in a love which has all the reality of our own nature in it.

# THE SUPERLATIVE WAY.[1]

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."—1 CORINTHIANS XIII. 1-3.

THE persons to whom these words were addressed were full of what may be called Christian ambitions. They coveted what they reckoned Christian gifts; the Church of Christ was for them a stage on which they aspired to be conspicuous figures. The Apostle has their correction in view when he writes, "Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way". It is literally a way in the superlative degree—*via maxime vialis*, as Bengel renders it—a way having in perfection all the qualities which ought to characterize a way; a way open to every one, unobstructed, leading straight to the goal of Christian greatness. This is the way of love which he proceeds to celebrate.

It has been finely remarked that the Apostle illustrates in his very first words the lesson he wishes to teach: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of

[1] This sermon has already appeared in "The Expository Times," and is printed by the kind permission of Messrs. T. and T. Clark.

angels and have not love." An unloving spirit would have said: "Though you speak with the tongues of men and of angels," and made the Corinthians, not himself, represent the bad example. The instinctive courtesy of the Apostle is inspired by love and shows how thoroughly he himself has learned his lesson. The simplest way in which we can enter into his thought is to make clear to ourselves what the gifts are which are sometimes supposed to supersede love, but which really depend upon it for their value in the Church.

The gift of tongues was an emotional gift. It was an ecstasy of feeling by which men were carried away, and broke into rapturous inarticulate utterances. The sublime realities of the Christian faith—God, Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the assurance of immortality—as they broke into the common life of man, disturbed its equilibrium profoundly. Nature rocked under the impact of the supernatural as a boat rocks in the water when a heavy weight is suddenly thrown into it. This emotional disturbance, though in some ways incalculable, seems always to have had one character. It was an ecstasy of praise. Those who were carried away by it uttered in this transport of feeling the wonderful works of God. What they expected when the impetus had subsided was an Amen at their giving of thanks. A modern musician has written songs without words: this is a very apt description for the peculiar kind of spiritual emotion called in the New Testament speaking with tongues. Probably the nearest approach to it most Christians make is when they are carried away by the feeling of a revival meeting. Many can still remember the revival of 1874, when Mr. Moody first came

to this country. Like most revivals, it lived in an atmosphere of praise: the first edition of Mr. Sankey's "Sacred Songs and Solos" came along with it, and the American organ. Everybody sang these hymns and sang them everywhere. The largest churches and halls were crowded out for months by multitudes surrendering themselves to the emotion. The words and the tunes—perhaps in some cases the tunes even more than the words—sang themselves into people's ears, into their very nerves and brain. They heard the rhythm of them through the beating of machinery or the noisy traffic of the streets. They heard it as they sat over their Bibles at home. They felt like singing all the time. The church was full of men who floated, so to speak, on this wave of emotion; an unutterable joy in the redeeming love of God seemed to sustain their life; it was full, as they would have said in the early days, of people speaking with tongues.

This is an experience which many make light of and even deprecate; they do not speak with tongues, and they do not want to. But this is not how it is regarded by the Apostle. He knew as well as any modern moralist that the promise of the new emotion is not always fulfilled. He knew that the equilibrium of the old nature which had been momentarily disturbed by the sense of Christian realities was too easily restored at the old level, and that men who had spoken with tongues might relapse and become "sensual, not having the spirit". But in itself this emotional susceptibility to spiritual realities is good. "I thank my God," says the Apostle, "that I speak with tongues more than you all"; I am more open than any of you to this access of feeling which rises to unintelligible

rapture. No one who has had in a time of revival the experience described above, no one who feels his heart beat quicker and his sympathies kindle as the refrain of a gospel hymn takes possession of his ear and his soul, will disagree with him. But good as this emotional susceptibility is, gift of God as it is, it is not good if it terminates in itself. It is not good if a man boasts of it, and judges on the strength of it those whose experience he does not appreciate and cannot understand. The ecstatic praise which is exhausted in utterance, the feeling which is exhausted in being felt, is in one aspect a kind of self-indulgence. It cannot be the be-all and the end-all of the Gospel. Taken by itself, it is no more than sounding brass or clanging cymbal, those deafening empty noises with which the Corinthians were familiar even in pagan worship. It is not the steam which is blown off with a loud noise, and is visible for a moment in dense white clouds, which drives the engine ; it is the steam in the boiler, which is subject to intense pressure, and is neither heard nor seen. Thank God for every Christian emotion, the Apostle says, but ask earnestly, persistently, and devoutly how it is to tell for the common good. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every one to *profit withal*," and the question on which everything turns is : What service is being done, by these prized exaltations of mine, to the Church which is the body of Christ ? For what ministries of love do they furnish the driving power ?

From emotional the Apostle advances to intellectual gifts : "though I have prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge". I say advances, intentionally, for this is what he means. The uncontrol-

lable emotion called speaking with tongues is no doubt a spiritual gift, when it is Christian realities which stimulate it, but it is the most elementary of spiritual gifts. It is the new life, indeed, but in a turbid semi-sensuous form, a form which is transcended when the Christian realities not only excite emotion but take possession of intelligence. It is not only inevitable but right that they should do so, and do it with decisive power. The world with Christ and redemption in it—the world in which the Son of God and the forgiveness of sins and eternal glory are real things—is another world. It makes another appeal to the intelligence, excites other reflections, demands other interpretations, reveals other prospects. All former philosophies are cashiered when the realities of the Christian revelation come within the horizon of thought. The intellect which submits to the impact of the Gospel receives a shock as startling and momentous as that which raises the emotions to ecstasy; the mind of man is born again under the supreme revelation of God. It gets an understanding of the world and of all God's ways with it and purposes in it undreamt of before. As St. Paul says here, it gets the gift of prophecy, and all mysteries and all knowledge are thrown open to it.

Probably no one ever had a more vivid experience of this than the writer of this epistle. If any man ever had his mind born again and his world made new in a great experience it was he. The enthusiasm, the intoxication, as it has been called, of the great speculative geniuses like Plato and Spinoza, who have tried to set this unintelligible world in an intelligible light before our eyes, is cold compared to the ardour with

which Paul reconstructs his universe with Christ for its Alpha and Omega, its principle and goal. "In Him," he has the exaltation of mind to write, "were all things created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and in Him all things are one." The man who was capable of thinking and saying this did not undervalue the intellect and its use in the Christian life. He felt it essential even to his self-respect to have a Christian view of God and the world, a Christian philosophy or theology; he felt the value of being initiated into the ultimate truth, of seeing the world in Divine Christian light—for that is what is meant by having "prophecy, mysteries, and knowledge"; but he felt also that no attainments in this direction touched the centre any more than the emotional excitement of tongues. Without love, to make the intellectual Christian the servant of the ignorant; without love, to keep the intellectual from being wise in his own conceit; without love, to check the intellectual when he is tempted to despise others, to restrain him when he would use his power to intimidate others or to establish a selfish ascendancy over them, knowledge is nothing. All mysteries may be open to a man—he may have the profoundest insight into the manifold wisdom of God—he may see the meaning, the methods, the issues of God's working in the world in a way which makes darkness light and crooked things straight; but without love, it does not count.

Most Christians, probably, at some time or other, have touched experimentally on speaking with tongues,

but one cannot be so sure about prophecies and mysteries and knowledge. The daring of New Testament thought in its interpretation of all things in the light of Christ can hardly be said to survive in the Church. A great philosophical theologian, a man who could search with the light of revelation the world known to us as Paul searched and read with the same light the world known to his generation, is one of the crying wants of the time. What we have to lament is not that people overvalue knowledge in comparison with love, or that they set too much store on Christian insight into the meaning and purpose of the world, but that they have no interest at all in the intellectual construction and application of Christianity. Their minds have not been sufficiently stimulated by the Christian revelation to want any new view of the world in the light of it. But extremes meet, and the lesson of the Apostle at this point is curiously applicable to a kind of petrified intellectualism which is to be found in all churches. There are always those to whom Christianity is pre-eminently a kind of knowledge, a system of truth or rather of truths. It means the truth of the Bible, or of the creed, or of some outline of Christian ideas in which they have been brought up. They have a zeal for this, and they are moved by what calls it in question as they are by nothing else. The ideal Christian for them is the defender of the faith, Mr. Valiant for the truth. It does not perhaps occur to them that this is the type of intellectualism which is most likely to be loveless. But much as he admired the character, Bunyan knew its perils when he told how *Mr. Valiant for the Truth* was assailed by *Wildhead*, *Inconsiderate*, and *Pragmatical*. What a figure these rogues would

cut in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The curious thing is that the intellectual Christian, or rather the man who champions a truth which is no longer living but only in possession of legal authority, is apt to imagine that they are allies, not enemies, and that he can enlist them all to fight the Lord's battle. They are in reality the vices, and how often the unconsciously cherished vices, of the degenerate intellectual without love.

The Apostle becomes more venturesome and paradoxical as he goes on to ever higher gifts. "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." Faith here is not used in the general sense of that trust in Jesus which makes a man a Christian; it is a specific spiritual gift operating not on the emotional nor on the intellectual but on the practical side of human nature. It is the gift which raises Christian efficiency to a high point. The consequences of inefficiency are so miserable and depressing that it is no wonder this gift is highly valued. What is of so much value to the Church as that it should have men in it who in spite of obstacles can do what needs to be done? not men who say what they ought to say, and then nothing happens, but men who positively achieve things, men who overcome the difficulties at which others helplessly gaze. If anyone prized this practical Christian efficiency it was Paul, who was a conspicuous illustration of it himself, and who often sought it in vain in his associates; yet not even this is the vital thing in the Christian life. We can almost think that as he wrote these words about the power of faith Paul had in his mind not only the saying of Jesus about bidding the mountain remove

and be cast into the sea, but the solemn words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount: "Many shall say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many mighty works?" It might well seem incomprehensible that spiritual powers should be wielded, and spiritual efficiency in a supreme degree exhibited, by men whom Jesus rejects; but Paul felt the truth there was in it, and so may we. The efficient man may lose himself in his very efficiency; the sense may steal upon his mind that *he* is the really powerful preacher, that his is the commanding personality to which reluctant circumstances yield, his the practical capacity which gets the belt upon the wheel and transmits force and sees that work is done; and when this happens, all is lost. For Christianity is not in this region of outward efficiency after all; it is in the soul. A man may be a great Christian worker, as we say, and no saint. He may do distinguished service to the Church, and have neither part nor lot in the kingdom of God. He may be one of those who at their departure are celebrated, mourned, and honoured by the Church, but to whom the Lord says, "I never knew you". These are terrible things to say, and to think, but when we are dealing with love, we are always on the verge of terrible things. What can be so terrible as to wound love, and how can love be wounded more terribly than by offering any doings or achievements as a substitute for it?

Emotional gifts, intellectual gifts, practical gifts, all are vain without love. Even the gift which most nearly counterfeits love is vain also. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I

give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." These, we might say again, are the very things we can conceive the Apostle doing himself; he was always forward to care for the poor; he died daily at his work. Certainly he did not undervalue the capacity for sacrifice or the practice of it; but he is putting an extreme case, and where sacrifice even the utmost is made (as it may conceivably be made) from ostentation or ambition, it profits nothing. There might even be a rivalry in philanthropy; who could think that the life of Christianity lay there?

And so we are driven back by the Apostle to the superlative way—the way which *is* a way, and along which we can really make Christian progress. Emotion has its value when excited by Christian realities—so has intellect—so has energy—so has sacrifice; but the one thing needful is love. It is only when love rules the use of gifts, and indeed compels us to use them for the common good, that they can properly be called Christian. And what is love? A great theologian has defined it as the identification of ourselves with God's interest in others. God *has* an interest in others. There is something in all men which is dear to Him, to which His love is pledged, which it would grieve Him to see injured or frustrated. Do we realize this, and that the question whether we love or not can only be answered in the light of it? Do we realize it in regard to those who are nearest and dearest to us—our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters? Do we realize it in regard to those who are members of the same congregation with us, or of the same social circle? Is there anything in our life which would not be there but for the sense we have

of God's interest in others? Could we point to anyone to whom we have ever shown the kindness of God for Jesus' sake? This is the only thing which is love in the Christian sense of the term. It is by this the Church and the Christian live, and without it they die. To identify ourselves with God's interest in the lives of others, to seek that God's will for them may be fulfilled, that that which is dear to Him in them may be saved, to put what we are and have unselfishly at their service for this end: this is love. Is there any such good thing found in us toward God and those who are dear to Him?

Now what the theologian defined the Apostle describes. He pictures for us in a glow of enthusiasm the modes in which love manifests itself in a world like ours. No doubt when he wrote his description of love he had in his mind those phenomena in the Corinthian Church which made its absence sensible, but the same phenomena are always reappearing, and we find the key to his picture nearer home. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Is there anything in us, when the contemplation of this picture has made us penitent, which can claim any kinship with it? It is not *our* likeness, we know that; but is there something in us which draws us inevitably and instinctively towards it, which makes us feel that it should be our likeness, and that it would be, if we yielded to the constraint of the love of God? If there is even this that remains,

let us strengthen it and not suffer it to die. The greatest part of our perfection, as Robert Bruce says, is to thirst for perfection—to look on this picture with humble longing hearts till we begin to grow like it.

But we ought not to say, to look on this picture. For what the theologian defines and the Apostle depicts is illustrated and embodied in our Lord Himself, and what we have to do is to look at Him. "Herein is love." We do not know what love is till we see it in Jesus, and when we see it there we see Him identifying Himself with God's interest in us. The revelation is not only made before our eyes, it is made with special reference to ourselves. In Christ's presence we are not the spectators of love only, we are its objects. Christ exhibits towards men, He exhibits towards us, that wonderful goodness which Paul describes. When we think what our life has been, and what has been His attitude to us from first to last, do we not say, "Our Lord suffers long, and is kind; He is not easily provoked; He does not impute to us our evil. Where we are concerned, where God's interest in us is concerned, He bears all things, He believes all things, He hopes all things, He endures all things." These are the thoughts, or rather these are the experiences, out of which love is born in our hearts. We love, because He first loved us All the time it is His love which must inspire ours. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

## THE RICH MAN'S NEED OF THE POOR.

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he was c othed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day; and a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate."—LUKE XVI. 19 ff.

MANY of the words of Jesus are best understood when least explained. They are true in the immediate impression they make upon the mind of a child, and if we could only become as little children and recover it, this is the only truth they are intended to convey. The story of the rich man and Lazarus—the evangelist does not call it a parable—is a case in point. In the minds of many grown-up readers it raises only irrelevant questions—questions which it does not raise for the simple, and which it is not intended to answer. In what condition does the soul survive this life? Is its condition fixed at or by death? Is there a further probation for those who have failed here, or who have never had a chance? Is the departed soul shut up in itself, in absolute loneliness, or can it communicate with God or with other spirits in that world or in this? I do not say these are not natural questions, but they are not questions with which Jesus is here directly concerned, and to seek answers for them here is precarious.

When we survey the Gospel according to Luke as a whole, we see that one of the main interests of the evangelist is in the teaching of Jesus about riches and

poverty. This was so characteristic of our Lord and so emphatic that no one telling the story of His life could possibly miss it, yet Luke has preserved a good deal which the other evangelists have overlooked. It is he alone who tells us that Jesus opened His ministry at Nazareth by applying to Himself the text, "He hath sent Me to preach glad tidings to the *poor;*" he alone who gives the first beatitude in the simple form, "Blessed are ye *poor*, for yours is the kingdom of God," and who adds as its counterpart, "Woe to you that are *rich*, for ye have received your consolation"; it is he alone who has the story of the rich man, who said to himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry"; and to whom God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee". And finally, it is he alone who has the story of the unjust steward who shrewdly used his master's money to buy friends for himself who would give him the shelter of their roofs when he lost his place. The moral of this shady story is daringly put by our Lord Himself: "And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles". As if He had said, "You are going to lose your place too, like the unjust steward: be as sensible as he was. Spend your vile money in buying friends—you will need them—who can bear witness to you and welcome you as you pass from this world to the other." It is a daring moral, not to be legally interpreted or applied, but with living power in it for those who are willing to take it as it is meant. Of course there will always be those who think they can refute it. "The

Pharisees," we read in v. 16, "who were lovers of money, derided him." They scoffed at the idea of a man *investing* in charity with the dividend in his mind which he would draw in the world to come. It is always easy to misrepresent when you do not want to understand; and the story of the rich man and Lazarus is the answer of Jesus to those who scoffed at the moral He drew from the unjust steward. It is the story of a man who forgot to invest in charity till it was too late. It consists of a visible scene, a scene behind the veil, and an appendix. It is worth while to look steadily at each, and then to summarize the teaching of the whole.

1. First there is the visible situation in vv. 19-21. The rich man's life is pictured before our eyes with all its indulgence and ostentation; he was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. There are lives like this, and people who can afford them. There is nothing they cannot buy—yachts, motor-cars, champagne, pictures, new and old books; no wish need be, and no wish is ungratified. There is no needless exaggeration in the picture, and not a touch of animosity or of class feeling. It is not said that the rich man made his money unjustly, still less that he coined it out of the sweat of Lazarus; his way of living is exhibited—that is all. Then side by side with him we have the picture of Lazarus. It is given more fully, and of course more sympathetically, but quite as impartially. It is a statement of facts and nothing more. Lazarus was a beggar man, whose body was covered with ulcers, and he lay at the rich man's gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table. What is meant by the dogs coming

and licking his sores is not quite plain. Perhaps the suggestion is that even the offensive animals that roam the streets of eastern towns were kinder to the poor wretch than his fellow men or his rich neighbour; but perhaps it is meant as the last touch of aggravation to his misery: these unclean beasts rasped his sores and he had not the strength to keep them at a distance. How desperately the poor man needed a friend! Yes, but not so desperately as the rich. What an opportunity, Jesus would have us understand, the rich man had to make Lazarus his friend—to buy his friendship with some of his miserable money. How much his friendship would have been worth to him in the future! But no such thing happened. The rich man was there in his purple and fine linen; the beggar was there in his rags and sores; and that is the whole story.

Perhaps under the influence of political economy we pity a little the rich man as well as the poor. Wesley tells us somewhere in his Journal that he met a man who proved to his own satisfaction that every one who could afford it ought to wear purple and fine linen and to fare sumptuously every day; and that by doing so he would do more good to the poor than if he fed the hungry and clothed the naked. Even if we have not an unsolved doubt that there may be something in this, we have a lurking sympathy with the rich man saying to himself, "This is endless. Relieve one and you bring ten. This man is a product of social conditions for which society is responsible, not I; society should put him in a hospital and keep him out of sight; and if the hospital were put on the rates, I should not refuse to contribute my share."

But the very point of the story is that Jesus takes no account of possible explanations or excuses. He deals only with facts. There is a poor man, destitute and in misery, at a rich man's gate, and nothing is done. Is that all?

2. No, in vv. 22-26 Jesus goes on to unveil the invisible situation. In the world into which Lazarus and the rich man are alike ushered by death, the parts are reversed. It is now Lazarus who feasts. He reclines on Abraham's bosom at the heavenly banquet, as John did on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper. It is the highest conceivable honour and felicity for a Jew. But the rich man is in hell, in an agony of thirst, tormented in flame. And there is something more terrible still. We are not told in the earlier part of the story whether the rich man had seen Lazarus at his door, but he saw him now afar off. He saw him, and would fain have had him as a friend. But it was too late. He had his chance of making Lazarus his friend while he lay at his gate, but he did not take it then, and it would never come back. There is something inexpressibly awful in the words, *Son, remember.* This lost soul, too, is a son of Abraham; he might have been where Lazarus is; nay, he ought to have been there. To understand why he is not, it is only necessary to recall the past. It is the very misery of hell to remember the lost opportunities of life, the chances that were given but not taken of winning the heaven for which men are made. Inexpressibly awful, too, is the finality implied in the words: "between us and you there is *a great gulf fixed*". The scene in the invisible world represents God's judgment on the earlier one, and against that

judgment there is no appeal. This is to all eternity God's verdict on such things. The rich man may have thought little or nothing about Lazarus while they were both on earth, or he may have excused himself from doing anything for him by the kind of sophistries with which we have sometimes excused ourselves; but in neglecting to make Lazarus his friend he decided his own destiny for ever.

3. At this point, it is natural to think, the parable might have ended; the lesson which Jesus intended to teach—that we should provide for the future by making friends of those who will welcome us into the world to come—has been powerfully and solemnly taught. The inhuman man is a lost soul: he enters eternity without a friend. But in point of fact the parable does not end here: there is a curious addition (vv. 27-31) in which the rich man appeals to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers, and Abraham persistently refuses. How is this connected in thought with what precedes? There are those who take it as a symptom of some surviving good in the rich man, an indication that he is not so destitute of humanity after all; there is a root of kindness and sympathy in him to which hopes of his own final restoration may be attached. Others, again, find in the appeal to Abraham only a symptom of latent rebellion; the rich man is virtually charging God with having been unjust to him, and making his restoration, if we may put it so, more impossible than ever. Both of these explanations fail in this respect: they introduce something which is irrelevant to the story as a whole. The idea in the appendix or supplement to the parable, however we define it, must be one which reinforces

the main lesson, not one which (as with the interpretations supposed) distracts attention from it. The way in which it is to be woven into one whole with what precedes is, I believe, something like this. "That is final," we can imagine Jesus' hearers saying to themselves when He had finished His unfolding of the invisible situation; "that is final; but is it fair? The rich man did not know about the unseen world. If he had seen hell fire as clearly as he saw the wretchedness of Lazarus or his own sumptuous table, he would have acted differently. He should have been more distinctly warned of the consequences of inhumanity, and so should others be." It is to meet such thoughts as these, which would be sure to occur to others as they occur to us, that the parable is continued beyond v. 26. There is no further interest in the rich man on his own account; he is only used to state the objection which is sure at some time or other to present itself to every one—that the invisible world of which the parable speaks is without evidence. Men do not know about it, and if motives from it are to enter life and influence conduct, they ought to be told about it by a witness they could not doubt. "Let some one go to them from the dead." The great thing to notice is that Jesus treats this objection as mere trifling. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them . . . if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." What is wanted is that men should be humane; and if the revelation of the character and will of God in Scripture, and the appeal of the beggar at the door, do not make them so, what will? They must become humane from considerations of humanity, or not at

all. If they can be inhuman with the Bible in their hands and Lazarus at their gate, no revelation of the splendours of heaven or the anguish of hell will ever make them anything else. So, at least, Jesus teaches, and so God acts. Who will venture to dispute the truth?

When we take the parable as a whole, therefore, it is not a lesson on the other world, but a lesson on humanity. In particular, it is a lesson on the opportunities which the rich have (and need), in presence of the poor, of making friends who can welcome and bear witness to them in the world unseen. I shall conclude with some reflections which it suggests for the mind and conditions of our own time and country.

The constitution of society is such among us that it is possible for great numbers of people to live almost without seeing the poor. There is a west end in every large town, and people can live exclusively in their own class. The destitute are not exposed as they are in civilizations of another order. There are poorhouses, infirmaries, asylums; the defective members of society, those who have been defeated in the battle of life, those who are physically and mentally, not to say morally, incapable of taking care of themselves, the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, are accumulated there; they do not shock us at our doors. But this is not all gain. What is unseen is too often unthought of, unfelt, not responded to. It does not constitute a motive for, and does not produce, humane and unselfish acts. The actual needs and woes of multitudes are hidden from multitudes of others; and there must be many who (apart from their own families) have never once considerately, spontaneously,

unselfishly, and from motives of pure humanity, helped the sick or the poor.

This is a loss to the poor, but what the parable invites us to consider is that it is a greater loss to those in whom humanity lies dormant, or is selfishly repressed. It is a loss to society when all help is organized and rendered through institutions, which however humanitarian they may be in their origin, tend constantly to fall short of being humane in their actual working. The personal contact of those who minister to the poor and destitute with those to whom their help is given sweetens the breath of society. Once when he thought himself dying Sir Walter Scott called his children round his bed and said to them: "For myself, my dears, I am unconscious of ever having done any man an injury, *or omitted any fair opportunity of doing any man a benefit.*" What kind of life is it, which in a world crowded with appeals for humanity, never gives a man or a woman the chance of being humane? It is precisely this which is wanted to enrich and render happy lives which are stale with selfishness and satiety. Lazarus needed the rich man, undoubtedly; but do not let us forget that the main lesson of the parable is that the rich man needed Lazarus more still.

The difficulty of helping the poor must not be made an excuse for inhumanity. It may be very difficult to do it wisely, and in such a way as not to injure those whom we would fain help. No doubt in a world like ours there are parasites, professional beggars, and sponges of all kinds, who prey upon charity and are ruined by it. Men who are rich and are known to be kind are besieged by petitioners, sometimes no doubt necessitous, but sometimes false, importunate, and

shameless. Often they are embarrassed, and sometimes when they find out that they have been defrauded they are tempted to give up interest in their kind, and to lapse into indifference and a stony heart. But anything is better than that. "Blessed," says the Psalmist, "is he that considereth the poor." Probably there are cases in which his consideration will lead to the conclusion that a touch of law is wanted to help with effect, and that the Charity Organization Society, or some institution which can deal with the shifty on the basis of rules, is better adapted than he is individually to do what needs to be done; but on the whole, this is not likely. It is the contact of man with man by which humanity is quickened and enriched on both sides, and when we can exercise it directly, it is twice blessed.

Another reflection germane to this story is that the great impediment to helping others is the love of pleasure. It is the desire, or what is perhaps stronger still, the unconscious tendency, to live as the rich man lived, that defeats the claim of the poor. One of the inevitable results of civilization is the multiplication of artificial necessities, and of those who are eager to meet the demand for them. We need or think we need a thousand things which we could very well do without, and there are a thousand people importuning us to spend our money upon them—thrusting them into our very hands on the most tempting terms. Plainly there are many people who find the temptation to spend so strong that they simply cannot keep their money in their pockets. It is drawn from them as by an irresistible attraction. They have no bad conscience about it, but they just do not know where it goes. It goes on dress, on travelling, on trinkets, on personal

adornments, and indulgence of every kind; and the result is, that when the call of charity comes there is nothing to meet it. All works of love, from Christian missions down, are carried on under the pressure of a perpetual deficit. When people say they have not anything to give for such causes, they are as a rule telling the truth. They have nothing to give because they have already spent everything. But the true moral of this is, that the call for charity is often also a call for self-denial and thrift. No one will ever have anything to give who has not learned to save, and no one learns to save without checking the impulse to spend his money for things which it would no doubt be pleasant enough to have, but which he can quite well do without. The rising generation is credited rightly or wrongly with excessive lack of restraint here. Everything goes. They live up to their means and beyond them, and have nothing to give away. This is not the way to become rich on earth, but what the parable teaches is the more serious lesson that it is not the way to become rich toward God. The man who has spent nothing on charity has no treasure in heaven. He is as poor as Lazarus there. He is on the way to a world in which he will not have a single friend.

The main teachings of the parable may be summed up in two further thoughts which it might almost be said to force upon us. The first is, that God appeals to us at our doors, and in ways which it is impossible for us to misunderstand. Many people believe themselves to be interested in religion, in whom nevertheless everything which could truly be called religious life is held in abeyance because of what they consider religious difficulties. They cannot properly *be* re-

ligious—they cannot, so to speak, get their religious life under way—until these difficulties are disposed of. They read this story of the rich man and Lazarus, for example, and their minds immediately go off on the familiar line. Where is Hades? Do all people enter it when they die? Is the state of those who are there affected by the resurrection? What is the authority for us of the words here ascribed to Jesus? Are they literally true, or are they true only in the impression they make on the moral imagination? These, to their minds, are the religious questions raised by this narrative, and religion seems to them to be somehow barred or held in suspense till these questions are answered. I do not say they are never to be asked, or that it is no matter how they are answered. But surely if anything is plain, it is plain that to the mind of Jesus the one important religious question is none of these. It is a far simpler question: What have you done with Lazarus at the door? No one will come from the dead to give you the clear and distinct knowledge of the unseen world which curiosity craves. But no ignorance, suspense, or indecision about these remote questions has any vital relation to religion. It is in the situation which we have to deal with at our doors that all real religious motives are to be found. It is in that situation, and under the influence of the motives which it yields, that we have to make—and do make—to God and man the revelation of what we are.

The second thought, and that in which we may say the parable is summarily comprehended, is that men are judged finally by the standard of humanity. The sublime picture of the last judgment in Matthew xxv. 31-46 may be said to be our Lord's own generalization of what is here presented in a particular case When

the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory and all nations are gathered before Him, He judges them by the rule which is here applied to the rich man. If there are those to whom He must say, "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not": if there are those to whom He must say this, there is nothing to say in reply. It is a final condemnation. Inhumanity is the damning sin which excludes for ever from the company of the Son of Man those who are guilty of it. The man who needs our help at this moment is trying what we are, and at the Last Judgment will be the decisive witness for or against us. True religion is as simple as this, and it is a fatal blunder when we allow a truth so vital and indisputable to be blurred or shadowed or thrust into the background by those philosophical or theological perplexities which are so commonly spoken of as religious difficulties. It is humanity—I mean humanity in the ethical, not the metaphysical sense; humanity as opposed to insensibility, selfishness, cruelty—which by uniting us to man and to God assures our future. It brings us into a common interest with God and His children. He who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked has treasure in heaven, and the very fact makes heaven real to him as it cannot be to the hard hearted. The invisible world will never be more than a source of unanswerable questions, which will take the delusive form of religious difficulties, to the unfeeling and inhuman; but to those who live in a love and humanity like that of Jesus it will be what it was to Him—another part of the Father's house, and as real as that which we see.

# IMMORTALITY.

"If a man die, shall he live again?"—JOB XIV. 14.

1. WHO has not asked this question, in suspense, in hope, or in fear? We know that we must all die: we know that those who are dearest to us must die: can our eyes penetrate beyond the veil which death lets fall? Is there any answer in the nature or heart of humanity to the question of Job, "If a man die shall he live again?"

If we look at the history of nations and religions, we see that the whole tendency of man has been to answer the question in one way. "Looking at the religion of the lower races as a whole," says Dr. Tylor in his *Primitive Culture*, "we shall at least not be ill advised in taking as one of its general and principal elements the doctrine of the soul's future life." The idea of the extinction or annihilation of man in death is indeed not so much a natural as a philosophic or doctrinaire one; an untaught mind is incapable of it, and it only appears as a fruit of reflection or speculation. The natural inclination of man everywhere is to believe not in his extinction, but in his survival. The ideas attached to the word may be vague, but they are real, and they exercise a real influence upon the life. Their effect is seen, sometimes in the burial customs of savage races—as in the interment of the warrior's weapons, or the artificer's tools, along with him, or more terribly

in the slaughter of his wife or his slaves, that he may have all that he needs with him in the spirit land; sometimes in the widely diffused worship of ancestors, which implies not only that the dead are believed to live, but that they have command over powers which may injure or benefit the living.

2. What strikes one most in looking at this widespread, one may truly say this universal, faith in man's survival of death, is its moral neutrality. All men survive, and they survive in practically the same condition, whether they are good or bad. The world into which they pass is conceived as a shadowy unsubstantial place, and the life of those who tenant it corresponds. The ancient Greeks called this place Hades, or the realm of the unseen; the ancient Hebrews called it Sheôl, which probably means the hollow place, the subterranean abode which was entered by the grave. The descriptions which are given of it in the Old Testament are numerous and depressing. Man existed in it, but did not live. He had no communion there either with the living God or with living men. It was a pale transcript of life, but not life in reality. It was a realm of darkness, dust, and endless silence, unbroken by the vision of God, or the voice of praise. The best men shrank from it with horror. The feeling with which they regarded it will be sufficiently illustrated by these lines from the Psalm of Hezekiah: "I said, In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of Sheôl. . . . I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. . . . But Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of nothingness, for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back. For

Sheôl cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee : they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, He shall praise Thee, as I do this day : the father to the children shall make known Thy truth." Many have been astonished and perplexed at finding such utterances in the Bible. They do not see how to reconcile them with the idea of any revelation made by God to man. But the truth is that such vague beliefs in man's survival, common as they are to the Hebrews and innumerable other races, are not a part of revealed religion at all. The instinctive belief that man survives death is only the point of attachment, so to speak, for a true faith in immortality. It is that in human nature which the spirit of revelation takes hold of, exalts, connects with God, fills with moral and religious contents, and makes effective as the great source of hope, courage, and consolation. The history of revelation, so far as this article is concerned, is the history of a process in which the instinctive belief in man's survival, with all its indifference to moral distinctions, was transformed into the New Testament faith in eternal life for the good, and the eternal loss of the wicked.

3. Of course I do not mean that apart from revelation men never in any degree transcended the vague ideas of the future to which I have referred. In many pagan religions the conception of the future life filled a great space ; in some, it even absorbed the attention of the worshippers to the exclusion of everything else. On this ground some have preferred the religion of ancient Egypt, for instance, or the religion of Persia, to the religion of the Old Testament. Certainly the future life bulks far more largely in both than it does

in the Old Testament. Every one, to speak only of the former, knows the extraordinary care which the Egyptians bestowed upon their dead. Every one knows about the mummies, in which the body was preserved for thousands of years, that the soul, which could not live without it, might survive too. Everybody has read descriptions, or seen pictures, of the Egyptian tombs, the everlasting houses of the departed, so much more solid and enduring than the abodes of the living. Every one has heard of the Book of the Dead—the most ancient book in the world—and of the judgment of souls in the under world, in which the Egyptians were taught to believe. Are not all these symptoms of a more advanced religion than we find among the Hebrews? I do not think so. It might be enough to reply that the Egyptian religion has died, and that that is God's verdict upon it; whereas the Hebrew religion lived, grew, and lives on to the present day in the fullness of the Christian faith. But it may also be pointed out that the Egyptian faith in the future, whatever its religious impulse may have been at first, became hopelessly demoralized at last. Man's standing in the judgment came to depend, not on his life and character, but on his due observance of a thousand rites or charms which had no moral significance whatever. A religion which at a first glance seems to be of peculiar moral promise is found on closer inspection to be a tangle of superstitious observances in which reason and morality have perished together. A mere preoccupation with the future could not redeem it from its ethical worthlessness; it was dead even while it lived, and now we can only examine it in its remains. Its history has an antiquarian interest;

it is not vitally related to the world's hope. It is a striking illustration of God's providential care of Israel, that though Israel lived long in Egypt, and was more or less in contact with Egypt for 1500 years, this dead faith in the life beyond—this non-moral, non-religious interest in what came after death—was never suffered to taint or pervert the simpler ideas of the chosen people. They might have nothing but the instinctive tendency to believe in man's survival, but at least they had it uncorrupted, and in due time God could make it grow to more.

4. But if religion did not of itself develop a true faith in immortality, was there no other power at work in human nature which could do so? We have all heard of arguments for the immortality of the soul: did not they result in anything? The true home of such arguments was Greece, and the great philosophers of that country, particularly Plato, speculated on the nature and the destiny of man. They felt there was something Divine in human nature, as well as something which seemed to them to be only of the earth. The mortality of the body they could not deny, nor did they wish to do so. They conceived of it not as the necessary expression and organ of the soul, but as a burden, a prison, a tomb; it was their one hope and desire that man's immortal part might one day be delivered from it. The Greek philosophers, too, as well as the great poets, rose above that moral neutrality which I have spoken of as characterizing the instinctive faith in man's survival. They saw rewards and punishments in the once undistinguishing future. Heroic men were admitted to some kind of blessed existence in Elysian fields; while the conspicuously bad, giants,

tyrants, lawless profligates, were tormented in some kind of hell. Such ideas, however, were confined to a limited circle; they did not interest themselves in the common people; and however much we may admire the nobleness of the poets and philosophers of Greece, it is not to them, any more than to the priests of Egypt, that the world is indebted for the hope of immortality.

5. Why was it then, we may ask, that both natural religion and speculative philosophy proved ineffective in their treatment of the future, and of man's relation to it? Why do we prize even the Old Testament in which the hope of immortality, to say the least, is so inconspicuous, above other religious authorities in which it figures so much more prominently? The reason is plain. These religions and philosophies failed because they wanted the one thing from which faith in immortality could securely and healthily spring—the one and only ground on which it could arise rich in moral and religious contents, full of consolation, of inspiration, of strength: a true conception of God, and of man and his relation to God. It is quite true to say that Israel had hardly any ideas about the future, and shrank in horror from those it had; but Israel had God, and that was everything. Israel knew that there was One only, the living and true God, from everlasting to everlasting, infinite in goodness and truth; Israel knew that God had made man in His own image, capable of communion with Him, and only blessed in such communion; to Israel, to see good was all one with to see God; with God was the fountain of life, in God's light His people saw light. This faith in God was greater than Israel knew; it could not be explored and ex

hausted in a day; it had treasures stored up in it that only centuries of experience could disclose, and among them was the hope of immortality. The believing nation of Israel, like Bunyan's pilgrim, unconsciously carried the key of promise in its bosom, even when it was in the dungeon of Giant Despair.

6. The great passages in the Old Testament, in which the hope emerges, come upon us suddenly, as the finding of the key came upon the pilgrim. This passage in Job is one. The tried man is in the very extremity of his distress. He feels—for so he interprets his distress—that God for some reason is angry with him, and that His anger will endure till he dies. His disease is mortal, and will carry him to his grave. But is that all? Job finds his faith in God come to his relief. For God is righteous, the vindicator of righteousness, and it is not possible for him to abandon a righteous man as Job would be abandoned, if his death ended all. The idea comes to Job through his faith in God, that Sheôl may not be the final outlook, and he puts it into the pathetic prayer: "O that Thou wouldst hide me in Sheôl, that Thou wouldst keep me secret until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldst appoint me a set time and remember me!" How patient such a prospect would make the suffering man. How uncomplainingly he would face the dreary underworld if he knew that it was only a temporary interruption to his communion with God. "All the days of my warfare would I wait till my release should come. Thou shouldest call, and I would answer Thee: Thou wouldest have a desire to the work of Thine hands." This is only the yearning of the soul, its faint anticipation, born of faith, of what might be; but in a

later passage we see it flame up triumphantly, though it is but for a moment. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand up at the last upon the earth, and after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another. My reins are consumed within me"—that is, I faint with longing for that great vindication. Both in Egypt and in Greece faith in immortality, such as it was, rested simply on conceptions of man's nature; here, as everywhere in revealed religion, it rests on the character of God. He is the Eternal Righteousness, and His faith is pledged to man whom He calls to live in fellowship with Himself. All things may seem to be against a man; his friends may desert him, circumstances may accuse him; but if he is righteous, God cannot desert him, and if he must die under a cloud, even death will not prevent his vindication. His Redeemer lives, and one day he shall again see God. And to see God is to have life, in the only sense which is adequate to the Bible use of the word.

7. In the Book of Psalms we have the same type of conviction presented from another point of view. The Psalmists write, as a rule, as men in the actual enjoyment of communion with God. Their life is not merely human, it is Divine as well. The fountain of it is with God. God Himself is their refuge and their portion; as one of them says, they have no good beyond Him. In their experience the Divine and the human interpenetrate each other: they see and enjoy God. Perhaps it is one consequence of this intense consciousness of God's presence and grace that they think so little about the future. Having

God, they have everything, and no time, past, present, or to come, can make any difference to them. But sometimes they do deliberately face the thought of death, and then we see their faith shine out. What has death to do with such a life as theirs? Is death stronger than God? If He holds us, can it pluck us out of His hand? Never. The Old Testament saints in the sublime hours of their faith had a sublime sense of their eternal security with God. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me unto glory." "God will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheôl, for He will receive me." "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheôl, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life—athwart that pathless gulf; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Nay we even find words of triumph over the last enemy which the New Testament in its loftiest mood can only borrow: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O grave, where is thy destruction?" The weapons of the King of terrors are struck from his hand, and death is swallowed up for ever. It was along this line of religious experience, inspired by faith in the living, true, holy, and gracious God, that the true hope of immortality entered the world.

8. It would have been natural once to pass from the Old Testament to the New almost without the consciousness of interruption, but this is hardly permissible now. When we consider the two in reference to the subject before us, it is obvious that in the New Testament the faith in immortality has new features.

In particular, it has become quite definitely a faith in the Resurrection. The growth of this peculiar form of the belief in immortality has been laboriously investigated, but not with entire success. The sacred books of the Persians, who certainly believed in some kind of resurrection, have been diligently explored, and many who know that the religion of Israel received no impulse from Egyptian ideas of the future suppose that it was strongly influenced by contact with Zoroastrianism. But the real fountain of the hope in immortality has been already indicated, and when we look at the Resurrection as it appears in Zoroastrianism and in Jewish apocalyptic literature on the one hand, and in the New Testament on the other, it is not more the similarity than the contrast by which we are impressed. In these other books, we are in a world of lawless fantasy, where anything is said of the future because nothing is known; in the New Testament we are on the same ground of historical fact and religious experience which is characteristic of the Old. Consider for a moment how the case stands.

9. Christians believe in their own resurrection to eternal life, because they believe in the Resurrection of Christ. But faith does not depend upon—it does not originate in nor is it maintained by—the Resurrection of Christ, simply as a historical fact. The Resurrection of Jesus is not simply a fact outside of us, guaranteeing in some mysterious way our resurrection in some remote future. It is a present power in the believer. He can say with St. Paul—Christ liveth in me—the risen Christ—the Conqueror of Death—and a part, therefore, is ensured to me in His life and immortality. This is *the* great idea of the New Testament whenever

the future life is in view. It is indeed very variously expressed. Sometimes it is *Christ in us*, the hope of glory. Sometimes it is specially connected with the possession, or rather the indwelling, of the Holy Spirit. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you." It is easy to see that the religious attitude here is precisely what it was in the Old Testament, though as the revelation is fuller, the faith which apprehends it, and the hope which grows out of it, are richer. Just as union with God guaranteed to the Psalmist a life that would never end, so union with the risen Saviour guaranteed to the Apostles, and guarantees to us, the resurrection triumph over death. Here is a faith in immortality which is moral and spiritual through and through—which rests upon a supreme revelation of what God has done for man—which involves a present life in fellowship with the risen Saviour—which is neither worldly nor other worldly, but eternal—which has propagated itself through all ages and in all nations—which in Jesus Christ invites all men to become sharers in it—which is the present, living, governing faith of believing men and women in proportion as they realize their union with the Saviour: a faith infinite in its power to console and inspire: a faith not always easy to hold, but demanding for its retention that effort and strain in which St. Paul strove to know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death, if by any means he might attain to the resurrection of the dead. And all this, which fills the epistles of the New

Testament goes back to the words of Jesus Himself: "Abide in Me, and I in you"; and, "because I live, ye shall live also".

10. "If a man die," asked Job, "shall he live again?" Let us put it directly, If *I* die, shall I live again? It is not worth while putting it as a speculative question: the speculators have not been unanimous nor hearty in their answer. Faith in immortality has in point of fact entered the world and affected human life along the line of faith in God and in Jesus Christ His Son. Only *one* life has ever won the victory over death: only one kind of life ever can win it—that kind which was in Him, which *is* in Him, which He shares with all whom faith makes one with Him. That is our hope, to be really members of Christ, living with a life which comes from God and has already vanquished death. God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Can death touch that life? Never. The confidence of Christ Himself ought to be ours. If we live by Him we have nothing to fear. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "Verily, verily I say unto you, if a man keep My word, he shall never see death." "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die." Believest thou this?

# WRONG ROADS TO THE KINGDOM.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He afterward hungered. And the tempter came and said unto Him, If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him unto the Holy City, and he set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou art the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee; And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest haply Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, Again it is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh Him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him; and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."—MATTHEW IV. 1-11.

MATTHEW, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of the temptation of Jesus in the same connexion: it followed close upon His baptism. His baptism was for Jesus the occasion of great and uplifting experiences; he saw the heavens open, and the Spirit descending and abiding on Him; He heard the heavenly voice, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased". But this hour of spiritual exaltation was followed by a period of depression and conflict. Was it possible for Jesus to

live his life through on the high plane to which it had been raised at His baptism? Could He go back into the common life of man, with all its disquieting possibilities, and in spite of the tempting alternatives which it presented, in spite of the painful pressure which it put upon Him, maintain the consciousness and the character of the Son of God? This was the question which He faced in the wilderness. A mocking writer on the life of Christ says of another situation in it, "One is not the Son of God every day". What the temptation story shows is the determination of Jesus, asserted from the very beginning, in the face of all compulsions and seductions, to be the Son of God, and nothing but the Son, every day—to be true, in all that the Father gave Him to do, to the heavenly voice and the gift of the Spirit.

We may take it for granted that Jesus did not speak to His disciples of this great crisis in His life merely to get an outlet for the emotion which attended it, or to gratify curiosity on their part about His history. He told them these things because they were important for them. As it has been put, these are not the temptations of Jesus, they are the temptations of the Christ. They are not the temptations of a private person, but of the person whose calling it was to establish the kingdom of God in the world; and they have the interest for all of throwing light on the true nature of that kingdom by exposing alike false though seductive conceptions of it, and false though alluring paths which might be supposed to lead to it. It is a wrong way to put this if we say that the temptations are not personal, but official; there is no proper sense in which the term official can be connected with Jesus.

They are the temptations of the person whose calling it was to bring in the kingdom of God, and they recur to every one who is interested in the same age-long task. They are the temptations of all churches, of all Christian workers, of all who have ideals in their life at all. It is necessary to be on our guard against false ideals, and even more against false methods of pursuing true ones. It is this which gives the story of our Lord's trial and victory perennial interest.

1. The first temptation has indeed a more private aspect: it is connected with the fact that after His long fast Jesus hungered. "If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." The Son of God and hungry! the tempter seems to insinuate, is not this a contradiction in terms? You cannot really be the Son of God, if your life is exposed to privations so cruel. There must be some mistake about that heavenly voice: you must have dreamed you heard it. Renounce your faith in a heavenly Father, and in His unfailing love and care, and help yourself in any way you can. To read the temptation thus implies of course that the suggestion to turn the stones to bread is a mocking one: the assumption is that the thing cannot be done. Certainly we cannot do it, and it is because we cannot that this temptation, in this aspect at all events, may come to any child of God. We have heard in the Gospel a voice from heaven, a voice sealed on our hearts by the Spirit, telling us that we are the sons of God: can it be true, we are tempted to ask, when poverty comes to us, or hunger, or pain? Can we hold to the heavenly Father under such pressure, or since He has not given us the power to turn the stones into bread, to annul every physical

evil, must we renounce Him, like Job, and die? Must we take our life into our own hands as though God were a word without meaning? Jesus endured this temptation and overcame. Even under the pangs of hunger he held fast not simply His integrity like Job, but His Sonship. His relation to God remained deeper, more vital, more certain than anything that could befall Him; no privation or pain whatsoever would make Him renounce God, or live in any other relation to Him than that of a trustful and obedient child. And is not this power to assert the superior reality of the inward and spiritual against all that is outwardly disconcerting the very pith of true religion? We need not pretend to understand the purpose of all privations, or say that we can justify the ways of God with man to the last detail: but if there is not in man a power to assert his sonship through privations and in spite of them, our Lord has lived in vain.

But the main interest of this temptation is wider. As Son of God, and called to establish His Father's kingdom in the world, Jesus was called at the same time to win an ascendency over men for God. He looked abroad on the world, especially on the world as it was to be seen in Palestine, and He saw various lines along which such ascendency could be sought and acquired. The very first was the one which assailed Him in this temptation. It would be easy for Him to command ascendency over multitudes, and to do it without delay, if He made it His business to turn stones into bread. If He made bread the first thing, the foundation of the kingdom—if He adopted the principle that once men's physical necessities were supplied, and hunger, cold, and toil out of the way, the

kingdom would come of itself—everything would be plain sailing for Him. This was a real temptation to Jesus just because He knew what hunger was, and because He had infinite sympathy with the poor. He was hungry here in the wilderness, He was weary and hungry as He sat by Jacob's well, He was so hungry in the last week of His life that He would gladly have eaten the berries from a tree by the way side. He lays extraordinary emphasis on the duty of charity; it is the unpardonable sin, which leads to eternal punishment, when He can say to anyone: "I was an hungered and ye gave Me no meat". Once, moved with compassion, He did feed five thousand men in a desert place. But what was the result? It was that this first temptation recurred: they wanted to take Him by force and make Him their king. This was the kingdom they wanted, a kingdom built on bread. But it was not the kingdom Jesus had come to set up. He withdrew Himself from that multitude, and retired to pray with God alone. He sent out the Twelve to face the rising storm on the lake, and in laborious toil and imminent danger of death forget this spurious hope. And soon after, in the synagogue at Capernaum, He spoke the searching words that drove the bread-seeking disciples from Him and showed the true basis of the kingdom. "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the signs, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto eternal life." Jesus was the friend of the poor, who went about doing good, but He felt it to be a temptation of the devil to base His kingdom on bread, and to count upon an allegiance evoked by loaves and fishes.

This temptation is always with the Church, and it is not the less a temptation that there are many at the present time who turn it into an accusation. The Church, we are constantly being told, does not care for the poor: it is a capitalist institution. People may starve for all it will do to help them. We would believe in it if it made our bread its first care, but if it does not, we will have nothing to do with it. Voices like these are sometimes the modern equivalent of the voice which whispered to Jesus in the wilderness, "Command that these stones be made bread. Go about the country multiplying loaves and fishes all the time." The answer to them is partly to say that they are false; the Church, as every one knows who knows anything about it, does care for the poor. Blot out what Christian people do for the poor in any great city, and how much would remain? But partly also it is to point out that the demand which is here made upon the Church is one to which, if it is to be true to Christ, it cannot accede. It dare not, either for itself or for others, contemplate a kingdom of God founded upon bread. It must have pity for the poor—it must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, or be lost for ever; but it must have the hardness to say to itself and to all men, even though they are poor, Seek *first* the kingdom of God; Labour not for the meat which perisheth; Man shall not live by bread alone. There are times when these are very unpopular things to say, and when there is therefore a strong temptation not to say them, but they were all said by Jesus. What comes first is sonship to God, faith in the Father, the love, trust, and obedience of a child; to this, everything else is to be postponed, in the possession

of this every trial is to be overcome. The Church dare not enlist under the banner of those who think that a programme of what are called social reforms—the kind of reforms which can be carried in Parliament—will bring in the kingdom of God. It cannot do this any more than Jesus could enlist under the banner of those who would have made Him a king by force. It may quite well be its duty to sympathize with such reforms and to promote them; but it is its specific function to make plain that in the kingdom of God a perpetual primacy belongs to the spiritual, and that it may be the trial of any child of God, in humble faith in the Father, to maintain his sonship through hunger, pain, and death.

2. The second temptation is of quite a different kind. As Jesus looked out upon the society around Him, He saw that one of the simplest ways of winning ascendency over men was to appeal to their love of the marvellous. If He only dazzled their senses sufficiently they would throng to His feet, and He would be able to do anything with them He pleased. This is what is imaginatively put in the temptation of the pinnacle. The background of the scene (we must suppose) is the courts of the temple, thronged with worshippers; and as Jesus descends through the air from the dizzy height, and alights among them uninjured, they crowd around Him and hail Him enthusiastically as the Messianic King. We know from the New Testament that this was in principle an appeal continually being made to Jesus. "Jews demand signs," says St. Paul, describing the habitual temper of his countrymen. From beginning to end they demanded them from Jesus. "They came and tempting Him asked

Him to show them a sign from heaven." "They mocked Him saying, Let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him." The idea is that miraculous works, dazzling, overwhelming, dumbfoundering, are the basis on which the kingdom of God can be built. Overpower the senses of men with wonders, and you will win their souls for God. This was for Jesus radically false, and it contained a temptation which He steadily resisted. He never worked a miracle of ostentation or display: His miracles had all their motive in love, and it was the love in them which bore witness to God. He trusted God, but He did not challenge Him; the works that He did were not venturesome audacities of His own, they were the works that the Father gave Him to do. He never renounced moral sanity, as though something could be done for God beyond its limits which could not be done within them. He trusted God, certainly, but He knew the difference between faith and insane presumption, and He knew that no impression made on the senses, however profound, could establish God's sovereignty in the spirit.

This temptation also has its lesson for all who are interested to-day in the coming of God's kingdom. There is always a tendency in the Church to trust to methods which appeal rather to the senses than to the soul, or which are believed to be reaching the soul though they never get past the sense. They may be cruder or more refined, sensational or connected with the symbolic side of worship, but the common character of all is that they fall short of being rational and spiritual. How tempting it is to trust to such impressions, as though the coming of the kingdom were really

secured by them—to trust, for example, to the feeling of awe and solemnity which comes upon us as we enter a great cathedral, or to the thrill which passes through us as we listen to the pure, passionless voice of a boy singing, "As pants the hart for water brooks," or to the power of some great preacher's eloquence, or to the inexplicable influence of a sacrament, celebrated with mysterious reverence and splendour. How tempting it is, yet how completely beside the mark! The only Church which claims to perform a miracle as the very centre of its worship falls whenever it makes the claim before this temptation. To turn bread and wine, under the very eyes of men, into the body and blood, soul and divinity of the Son of God, and to do it with mysterious and elaborate ceremonial, would be a miracle as astounding as for Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and to light on earth unharmed—as astounding, and, in the impression it produced, as irrelevant to the work of God. No doubt such things make an impression and have an influence; but they are not the influence and the impression through which that kingdom of God can come for which Jesus lived and died. How little He had of all that churches are tempted to trust in now! How little there is in the Gospels about methods and apparatus! Jesus had no church nor hall; He spoke in the synagogues when He had the opportunity, but as willingly and prevailingly in the fields or by the the seashore, in a boat or a private house. He had no choir, no vestments, no sacraments, and we may well believe He would look with more than amazement upon the importance which many of His diciples now attach to such things. "He spake the word unto

them," that was all. The trust of the Church in other things is really a distrust of the truth, an unwillingness to believe that its power lies in itself, a desire to have something more irresistible than truth to plead truth's cause; and all these are modes of atheism. Sometimes our yielding to this temptation is shown in the apathy which falls upon us when we cannot have the apparatus we crave, sometimes in the complacency in which we clothe ourselves when we get it and it draws a crowd. This is precisely the kind of crowd which Jesus refused to draw. The kingdom of God is not there, nor is it to be brought by such appeals. It is not only a mistake, but a sin, to trust to attractions for the ear and the eye, and to draw people to the church by the same methods by which they are drawn to places of entertainment. What the evangelist calls "the word"—the spiritual truth, the message of the Father and of His kingdom—spoken in the spirit and enforced by the spirit, told by faith and heard by faith —is our only real resource, and we must not be ashamed of its simplicity.

3. The last of our Lord's temptations is the one which has been most variously interpreted, which is another way of saying the one which has been least certainly understood. The tempter takes Jesus to a high mountain, shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and says, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me". It is easy to see the connexion of this temptation with the baptism. The same voice which pronounced Jesus Son had also pronounced Him heir. The same Psalm which says to the Messiah, "Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee," says

also, "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession". Jesus was born to rule, and He was conscious of it in the very depths of His being. He had a kingly nature, men naturally felt His ascendency, it was He whose right it was to reign. No one was so capable of using power well. All that He saw was properly His inheritance, and the question before His mind in the wilderness was how He was to obtain effective possession of it. How was He to get a foothold in the world as it was, from which He might advance to its conquest? As such questions stirred in His mind, and He looked out on the world which was to be the scene of His sovereignty, another temptation, another delusive possibility of action, was presented to Him. He saw that there was a great power already established in the earth: was it conceivable that if He recognized that power He might be able to obtain help from it? No doubt it was the power of evil, but one of the terrible things which experience teaches is that evil is a power. It wields vast resources, it can offer immense bribes. In Luke the tempter is represented as saying, "All this has been handed over to me, and to whomsoever I will I give it." This has struck some as transparently false, but if it were transparently false there would be no temptation in it. The possibility of the temptation lies in the two facts that the sovereignty over the world belonged of right to Jesus, as the Son and representative of God, and that an immense and actual power in the world was unmistakably wielded by evil. Could Jesus make any use of that power? Could He, in order to obtain a footing in a

world where evil was so strongly entrenched, give any kind of recognition to evil? Could He compromise with it, acknowledging that it had at least a relative or temporary right to exist, and making use of it till He could attain a position in which He would be able to dispense with its aid? This is the real question in the third temptation. It is not that Jesus was tempted to seek a worldly instead of a spiritual kingdom, or a kingdom based on force or fraud instead of love—a kingdom like Rome or Parthia instead of heaven; it is that He is tempted to accept the alliance of evil in establishing His kingdom, to take the help of the devil in the service of God. But to get the Son of God to admit that evil had to be squared somehow, and that an irreconcilable attitude to it was impracticable, and would prevent the kingdom of God from ever getting under way, would be to defeat His mission altogether. Hence at this point Jesus repels the tempter with passion—Get thee behind Me, Satan—as feeling how powerful was the temptation and how critical. We seem to hear Him saying to Himself as He says afterwards to all His disciples: "All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them! What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?"

It hardly needs to be said that this temptation also remains with the Church. Evil is still a great power in the world, and as long as it is so the question will continue to arise whether it is not a power of which we can make some use for the kingdom of God. It is all the more sure to arise because evil is strong enough to cause great trouble and suffering to those who refuse to transact with it. Hence people *will* ask

whether there is no way in which we can take the loan of it, so to speak, in God's service—no method by which we can for the moment recognize it, yet avail ourselves of its recognition to secure its defeat—no philosophy or practical skill which will enable us to trade on its capital and to make our own or God's profit. This is the place at which subtlety may deceive us, but simplicity never will. Go to the bottom, as a simple mind instinctively does, and all this philosophizing and negotiating with evil is worshipping the Devil. That is not what it is called, but that is what it is. And it is as vain as it is wicked. No one ever makes anything by it. The Devil is an egoist, and will not do any man a good turn for God's sake. If anyone wishes to work for the kingdom of God, there is only one possible attitude to evil, however plausible and powerful—the attitude of simple outright defiance, which owes allegiance to God alone.

This truth has to be applied in various ways, and will hardly be applied without giving offence. There may be a bad man in the Church's environment, who has nevertheless great social influence: is it not fair enough to get his financial or his social support even for the cause which his life discredits? May we not get his patronage for the church fair, and get good of it, even though it is given not without indifference or contempt? The answer of the Gospel is quite unequivocal: to accept such patronage is to fall down and worship the Devil, and that is not the way the kingdom of God comes. Or there may be a bad institution in our environment: the liquor interest, or a corrupt interest in municipal or national politics. Do not alienate so powerful a section of society, we

are sure to be told, by declaring the mind of Christ about their trade or their conduct. Recognize their right to exist, and they will recognize yours. You will do more good in the long run by acknowledging facts than by knocking your head against a wall. Certainly there is nothing more to be desired than that facts should be acknowledged; but the final fact which we are here summoned by our Lord to recognize is the fact that with evil He can make no compromise whatever; and as for knocking our heads against walls, how would those who are so quick to use such language describe the way in which He came by His death? Even in things less doubtful we have to take care that we do not ally the Church with what is alien to it, and especially that we do not count on that alliance for its strength. There are plenty of people who avow that they have little faith in Christianity except as it has entered into alliance with the spirit of a nation, and is embodied in a state church; it is its political prestige which gives it its standing ground, and enables it to discharge its function in the national life. This is precisely what the Gospel here condemns. The spirit of a nation, as we are well aware, is capable of pride and selfishness, of violence and inhumanity; and the strength of the spiritual can never be derived from so ambiguous a relation. The Church exists, not to be quickened by the spirit of any nation, however great, but to embody the wider and greater spirit of humanity, nay the very spirit of God. It is always being tempted to seek the alliance and patronage of things lower than itself—of the things that have power in this world: wealth, rank, social distinction, political status. And in all such cases, it is the lower

which bribes the higher and takes advantage of it; we fall down and for the vain help He promises worship the Prince of this world, forgetting that He alone can be our help Who claims our undivided allegiance for Himself.

Such were the temptations of the Son of God which He anticipated and vanquished in the opening of His career: such still are the temptations of His Church, and of all who as sons of God are workers together with Him. That is why we think and speak of them still. When they come upon us, let us set the Lord always before us: not despairing of God in trial, nor promising ourselves and others that physical trials will cease; not presuming on God, nor trying by hypnotizing men's senses to win their spirits for Him; not shutting our eyes to the power of evil in the world, but, conscious of the sovereign power of God, bidding it defiance in His name. It is as we follow Jesus thus that we shall become partakers not only in His tribulation and in His patience but also in His kingdom.

## THE LEAVEN OF THE SADDUCEES.

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."—MATTHEW XVI. 6.

THE Pharisees and the Sadducees appear at the beginning of this chapter asking Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. Their request is refused. Jesus had wrought wonders among them already which ought to have been more effective than they were. "If the mighty works which were done among you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago." Instead of working more miracles gratuitously, He left them and departed, and we cannot feel too strongly that when He goes away the evidences of Christianity vanish with Him. If He is out of our sight we can have no idea either of what it is or of what it rests upon. In the silence which followed this ungenial encounter, our Lord seems to have brooded over the antipathy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What was the cause of it? What was it in their spirit and temper that made them so unresponsive, so unsympathetic to Him? Whatever it was, He speaks of it here as a leaven, and warns His disciples against it. Leaven is a figure for something which works secretly and by way of infection. We are familiar with the idea of inoculation as a protective against disease, but there is such a thing also as being rendered proof against health-giving power. The man who is inocu-

lated with the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees—the man who has taken into his spiritual nature the virus of their habits and temper—becomes immune in the presence of Jesus. He is not affected as a human soul ought to be affected. He is not impressed otherwise than as the Pharisees or Sadducees themselves were impressed. He unconsciously and securely defies the influence of Jesus, as one who has been vaccinated, for instance, unconsciously and securely defies the contagion of smallpox. It is the unhappiness of falling into such a condition that we are warned of in the text.

When Jesus spoke, the Pharisees were more numerous than the Sadducees and more powerful, and probably the need to beware of them was the greater. In its essence, Pharisaism is virtue which involves the sense of superiority to others, and is therefore destitute of redeeming power. The Pharisee is a person who is complacent about himself, and despises human nature. In the Church, the leaven of the Pharisees is apt to become potent when questions of doctrine and worship take precedence of life. It is the temper which indulges itself in the idea that *we* are the true people of God; *we* hold the true Catholic or the true evangelical doctrine; *we* believe in the incarnation and the atonement, in resurrection and judgment, in the inspiration and the infallibility of Scripture; *we* believe in the sanctity of the Sabbath and the obligation of worship; we cannot but look down with a pious shudder on all that is sceptical, heretical, unbelieving; we instinctively keep ourselves to ourselves in their presence. It is easy to see that goodness of this type can never help others, and that it is remote from every-

thing we see in Jesus. It is not too much to say that it is equally hateful to God and man. But it has been exposed so often and so completely that it is discredited as soon as named. The Pharisees are not a proud and popular sect now, by whom we may easily be infected unawares; the real danger lies with the Sadducees, and it is their leaven against which we have to be on our guard. What is it, then, and what are the symptons of its working?

In the time of Jesus, the Sadducees were the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem. They had the temple and its vast revenues in their hands, and all their worldly interests were bound up with the maintenance of the existing religious order. They were also charged with the administration of all national affairs, and especially of all arrangements between their own and foreign nations. They professed the true religion, of course; indeed they were its official representatives; but they were in contact with a larger outside life, and they had to maintain a *modus vivendi* with it. In all this there were temptations to which the Sadducees succumbed; and the way in which they explained and justified their transactions and compromises—the Sadducean philosophy, or spirit, or temper—is the contagion we are to avoid. In what way, then, let us ask, did it show its working?

1. In the first place, it showed itself in a tendency to secularize religion; that is, to acknowledge it simply as part of the existing order of society, to give it its place and to keep it in its place. Religion for the Sadducees was an institution, not an inspiration. It was part of an established system of social order with which all their worldly interests were bound up, and

their one concern was to maintain the existing equilibrium. Living religion the Sadducees dreaded. A religious *movement* perturbed them, and they did not know what to make of it. When the Christian religion began to put forth its irrepressible expansive power after the Resurrection, we are told that "they doubted whereunto this would grow". They did not want growing things at all in that sphere. A religion that grew, that operated as a creative or re-creative power, that initiated new movements in the soul or in society —a religion that gave men new and infinite conceptions of duty, making them capable of self-dedication and martyrdom, so that you could never tell what mad disturbing thing they would do or try—a religion that disclosed another world, and made a power so incommensurable with all present interests as immortality a present motive in the lives of common men—such a religion the Sadducees could only regard as the enemy. They did not like it; they had no mind to it and no time for it. Their minds and their energies were absorbed in keeping up the social equilibrium which was so advantageous for them against pressures which they understood—Rome on the one hand, and fanatical nationalism on the other; and the new and incalculable force which they could not help suspecting in Jesus was too much. They were more than willing to give religion the formal acknowledgment which its place in the social order required, but a religion which for anything they could tell might explode the social order was something with which they could hold no terms.

This attitude to the Christian faith—this particular working of the Sadducean leaven—is not confined to ancient times. It is the peril, in the first instance, of

an established clergy, with vested interests in things as they are. Of course I do not mean by an established clergy the clergy of a state church only; the danger is real wherever the profession of Christianity has settled into the customs of a country, and vested interests of all sorts have become interwoven with it. It is real for all men who have been born and brought up in the Church, and who continue to give the Christian institution that formal recognition which decorum requires, but who find their life apart from this so engrossing, so exacting, and so rewarding, that the institution ceases to be vital, and their religion becomes the only dead and uninteresting thing about them. They may feel like the ancient Sadducees that they have no choice. It takes them all their time to maintain their position. Every atom of their mental and moral capital is invested in their worldly concerns, and they feel as if they could not keep their place if they withdrew the smallest fraction of their interest. But the result is that a man living this life may be startled some day to discover that he has no religion. When he sees the real thing in another soul it frightens him. He hears some one pray, and feels at the same instant how true and vital it is, and how impossible for him. He cannot speak to God any more than he can speak Chinese; the leaven of the Sadducees has stupefied if it has not killed him. Beware of letting any institution, or the observances of any, even what we call sacred, custom take the place in your life of direct communion with God and Christ.

2. Another way in which the working of the Sadducean leaven is shown is this: it comes out as a tendency to prefer what we call experience to inspira-

tion, the wisdom of life to the authority of the word of God. Experience is a great word, but it makes a great difference where a man makes his experience; whether it is in the world, without God, as St. Paul says of the heathen; or whether it is with God, in the world. If we get our experience in the world, without God, it will certainly betray before long an aversion to the word of God. Far back in the history of Israel, as early almost as 600 B.C., long before the Sadducean name was known, we can see clearly the workings of the Sadducean leaven. Ezekiel heard his fellow countrymen by the banks of the Chebar saying, "We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone" (Ezek. xx. 32). They knew in their hearts that they were not really as the heathen, or they could never so much as have formed this thought. God had revealed Himself to them, and that revelation had fixed for them the high responsibilities which the knowledge of God always brings. For the exiles by the Chebar they were only too high. It is not practicable, they said, to live at the level to which the voice of God through the prophet calls us; in the name of common sense let us say so, and resolve to live at another level; let us be like the heathen, the families of the countries, and serve wood and stone; let us give up the irrational claim to be a people specially taught of God; let us take our chance, and sink or swim with mankind. It is quite easy to put a liberal and philosophical aspect on such thoughts, and to buttress them by appeals to the teaching of comparative religion, and so forth. The Sadducees did it constantly. They were brought into contact with foreign nations, and especially with that gifted nation the Greeks.

They saw how wonderfully the Greeks had mastered life, how much they made of it, how brilliantly they reproduced it in their art, how profoundly they criticized it in their poetry and philosophy; and they almost involuntarily fell to asking, Why should we be so conceited as to claim a place apart as a people of God, with a revelation of God not made to others? yes, and to burden ourselves besides with the responsibility of living up to it? Let us lose ourselves in the race, and stand or fall with it. We cannot digest the idea of the supernatural. We can neither think out nor live out the idea that God has given a special revelation, involving special responsibilities, to *us*.

There is no man living who has not been conscious of this working of the Sadducean leaven in his own veins. In the Church we have all been brought up to believe in revelation and in inspiration. We have been taught to believe that God speaks to us in the Bible, and especially in Christ, as He speaks nowhere else in the world, and that there is an authority here against the truth and supremacy of which there is no appeal. But is this all that is to be said? I venture to put it more strongly. I venture to say, speaking of those who have been brought up in the Church, that we have not only been taught, but have *experienced*, the inspiration of the Bible, the presence of God in it speaking by His Spirit to our hearts. We can remember the time when our conscience was subdued and quickened by the words which revealed the awful holiness of God. We can remember when the words of Jesus fell on our hearts in the glory of their grace and truth, and we knew that they were words of eternal life. Dare we ever go back upon these ex-

periences? Dare we try to evade the responsibilities they create? It cannot be. No matter how plausible, how large-minded it may seem to say, "We will be like other people, take our chance, sink or swim with our kind"; our responsibility is fixed by these experiences of revelation, and it is a Sadducean leaven which tempts us to evade this truth. No doubt, a man is not a child, and as we know more we read our Bibles with other eyes; but the child's impression of the word of God and its authority is unchangeably right; and all that deadens our sense of responsibility in relation to it, all that tempts us to plead experience against its practicability, all that would discount its inexorable judgments or qualify its infinite grace, is Sadducean poison. There are many examples to show us to what it leads. The denial of a special presence of God in Scripture ends inevitably in the denial of a special presence of God in Christ. When the Bible is just another book, Christ is just another man. And the spirit which can show Him to His place among the other spiritual luminaries of the world is more than half prepared to ignore Him altogether. It was the Sadducees at the beginning who convinced themselves that there was no room in the same world both for Christ and them, and that is still what the Sadducean temper comes to.

One mode in which this tendency to disparage revelation comes out, even in what ought to be Christian preaching and teaching, is distrust of the great things in the Gospel as mysterious. The avowed aim of many who plead the cause of Christianity is to be bright, practical, rational, attractive; to meet people on their own ground. Under the guidance of such

aims the world of New Testament truth too readily contracts; we hear nothing of the atonement, of the new life in Christ, of immortality and eternal judgment. With the narrower conception of the realities with which it has to deal, the Church soon comes to have lower ends and with them lower means; it ceases to have in the full sense of the term a Divine or Christian calling; it lapses into a more refined piece of the world, and sometimes into futile efforts to compete with the world on ground of the world's choosing. I do not say a word against the development of the social, the institutional, or the philanthropic side of Church work; but Christianity lives by the supernatural and eternal, and all that obscures this or thrusts it into the background is the leaven of the Sadducees against which we are here warned.

3. There is one other point to refer to, on which the New Testament lays particular emphasis. The Sadducees are described as people who say that there is no resurrection, and that angel and spirit are words without meaning. They not only denied immortality, they derided it. They invented the story of the woman who had had seven husbands, and asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. It was invented to leave the laugh on the Sadducean side in their discussions with the Pharisees, but the laugh is not much to have on your side in questions about God and man and human destiny. The Sadducean objections to immortality, as raising absurdly unanswerable questions, no doubt seemed to them, as they still seem to many, truly philosophical—the inevitable refusal by acute and enlightened minds of impossible ideas; but according to Jesus they rested on a two-fold ignorance. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of

God." The Scriptures mean, of course, the Old Testament Scriptures, and according to Jesus there is a revelation of immortality there. There is a revelation of immortality because there is a revelation of God entering into a relation of friendship with men so intimate that He consents to be called *their* God. "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may never themselves have understood all that the friendship of God involved: they may never have suspected that life from the dead was in that word. But Jesus understood. He knew that the friendship of God was something which time could not exhaust and against which death was powerless. He lived and died believing in immortality, because in life and in death He knew the Father. The supreme utterances of Scripture—those words in which the human spirit has revealed once for all what it is capable of—illustrate the mind of Jesus here. "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee; Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me unto glory." "I am persuaded that neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "They shall never perish . . . no one is able to pluck out of the Father's hand." Those who know what God is to man, and only they, are in a position to speak about immortality. But no one ever knew this as Jesus; and accordingly, for those who understand it, the word and faith of Jesus, as arguments for immortality, outweigh the scepticism of all lower minds. To be ignorant of God, the God whose relations with men are revealed in Scripture, is to be out of count when immortality is in question.

The other kind of ignorance to which scepticism is

due is described by Jesus as ignorance of the power of God. The world of nature and of natural relations, in which we live at present, has evidently no room for immortality; and the Sadducees drew the inference that because we cannot be immortal in this world, or in a world which simply reproduces this, therefore we cannot be immortal at all. But this is to make the present world the measure of the power of God, and it is against this that Jesus protests. The truth is that the present world—nature as we call it—is so far from defining God's power that what it suggests to a living mind is rather its unsearchableness and infinity. This is the key to the passage in which St. Paul, in a discussion of the resurrection body, dwells on the boundless variety and wealth of nature; the God who has such resources at His disposal cannot be embarrassed in providing for the immortality of man. It is the key also to one of the most wonderful passages in Job, where, after a sublime contemplation of the greatness of God in nature, he concludes: "Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways: And how small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?" God can sustain man's life in another order or mode of being to which the Sadducean conundrums about the Resurrection do not apply; and it is such an order, not the perpetuation of the present, to which the hope of immortality refers.

The question of immortality is in some respects a very simple one. It is the question how much God can or will give to man, and how much man is willing or able to receive from God. No one can answer it decisively but one who has true thoughts both of God and man. This is what makes the answer of Jesus so important. And everything that prompts or fosters

unworthy thoughts of either—everything which represents God as powerless or ungenerous, and man as insignificant or contemptible—everything which discredits the idea of union and communion between the human and the Divine—is important too. It is important because it is the leaven of the Sadducees by which our spiritual nature is benumbed and rendered insensible to all that God means toward us in Christ and can do for us through Him. Surely we do not need to be told how many secret allies in our souls conspire with the tendency to believe that death ends all. All our natural indolence, all our reluctance to make spiritual efforts, all our unwillingness to conquer truth and goodness from nature, and to live in God always, are on this side. So is our willingness to reduce the living God to a stream of tendency, and to deny eternal judgment because we do not see how we could execute it justly, or because it is disproportionate to so worthless a being as man. All this is the leaven of the Sadducees, to be purged out by disciples of Christ.

If we ask whether there is not an antidote for it, the answer can only be given in the words of Jesus, *Abide in me.* Jesus was no Sadducee. He believed in the living God and in a living religion which should make all things new. He believed in revelation: He heard the voice of the living Father in the Scriptures, and so may we if our ears are not dulled with sophistry or secularity or complacency. He believed in immortality. He lived and died believing in it, and He said to His own, "Because I live ye shall live also". To keep our hearts against all these debilitating, deleterious, and in the long run fatal tendencies, there is but one thing we can do: abide in Christ, and let His words abide in us.

## WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—1 JOHN I. 7.

THIS is one of the passages in Scripture in which the language is so spiritual, and so remote from that which we use in daily life, that it is apt to leave no impression on our minds. We have no inclination to dispute it, but it does not arrest us. If we do not think of it, it sounds familiar, but it grows strangely unfamiliar if we try to realize what it means. I have heard an eminent scholar express impatience with the first epistle of John as a whole; it seemed to him, he said, the innocent prattle of a good old man, not to be too seriously followed. But a scholar much more eminent —perhaps the most distinguished New Testament scholar of the last generation, Dr. Hort—characterized this same book as the most passionate in the New Testament. It is the book, if our minds were only at home in the region in which it moves, which says the last word about all the great things in the Christian religion; the simplest if you will, and the most free from effort, but also the most profound, the most searching, and the most impassioned of all.

This text brings before us two of the great experiences and privileges of Christians, and the condition on which they depend. These experiences are, first,

mutual fellowship, and second, continuous sanctification. This interpretation of the Apostle's language has indeed been disputed. The words "We have fellowship one with another" have been supposed to refer not to the fellowship of Christians among themselves, but to the fellowship of Christians with God, the "we" representing under one term God and the writer of this letter and those for whom he speaks; and the words "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin" have been interpreted not of continuous sanctification or progress in holiness, but of the annulling of the responsibility for sin; in theological language, they have been taken to refer to justification, not sanctification. When it comes to experience, the things which are here distinguished are never separated. The mutual fellowship of Christians is a fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and there is no justification known to Scripture which does not sanctify, nor any sanctification which does not rest on a fundamental annulling of the responsibility for sin. But though this makes the difference of interpretation practically unimportant, I believe the way in which I put it at first is that which truly represents the mind of St. John: the experiences in which it comes out that a certain condition is being fulfilled are the fellowship of Christians with each other and their progressive sanctification. The condition on which these experiences depend is that of walking in the light as God is in the light. Following the order in the text, I shall speak first of what is meant by this condition.

1. *If we walk in the light as He is in the light.*— Light and darkness are words which the Apostle uses

both in the Gospel and the epistle, but which he never explains. Partly they do not need explanation and partly they do not admit of it. We feel the freedom with which they are used when he says in one sentence that God is light, and in the next that God is in the light. We feel that in some aspects light and darkness might be regarded as equivalent to holiness and sin, but the text itself is enough to show that they are not to be simply identified. The Christian conscious of sin is called by the Apostle to walk in the light as God is in the light in order that the blood of Jesus may cleanse him from all sin. What is suggested by "light" throughout the passage is something absolutely luminous and transparent, in which there is no concealment and no need for any. To say that God is light is to say for one thing that in God there is nothing to hide: if He is dark, it is with excess of bright; it is because He dwells in light that is inaccessible, not because there is anything in Him which of its own nature craves obscurity. This is the line on which our thoughts are led by the following verses, where the opposite of walking in the light is evidently hiding sin, or denying that we have sinned. It is some kind of secrecy—which no doubt has its motive in sin—that is meant by darkness, and this gives us the key to walking in the light. To walk in the light means to live a life in which there is nothing hidden, nothing in which we are insincere with ourselves, nothing in which we seek to impose upon others. We may have, and no doubt we will have, both sin and the sense of sin upon us—"if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"—but we may walk in the light nevertheless, if

we deal truly with our sin, and it is only as we do so that we enjoy Christian fellowship and are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. What, then, is specially required of us if we would walk in the light?

It requires in the first place prompt confession of sin. The sin that lies upon the conscience unconfessed darkens the whole moral being. But to confess is not the first impulse when we have sinned. Pride, fear, shame, and other powerful feelings keep us back. Our first impulse is to hide our sin, or rather to ignore it; to try to believe that the best that can now be done is to forget it, and to go on as if it had never been; to brace ourselves up to bear the inevitable consequences as stoically as we can; in any case, to say nothing about it, in the hope that in time it may work itself out, and that God will say nothing about it either. The thirty-second Psalm, which tells the story of a penitent and pardoned sinner, begins it with the words, "When I kept silence". That is the first impulse. But to keep silence is to walk in the dark and to walk alone. The unconfessed sin separates us from God, and from all His redeeming and cleansing power. Of course He knows it, but it is not enough that He should know, it is necessary that we should tell Him. If we are going to walk in the light, there must be no shunning of God's presence, no restraint of prayer, no hiding of anything from Him even for an hour.

Further, to walk in the light means that we confess our sins without reserve. Sometimes we do not really confess when we think we are doing so: we rather admit our sins than confess them, and we seek in all possible ways to explain, to extenuate and to

excuse them. We may confess them in words, but in the secret of our hearts we do not take blame; we do not admit full responsibility for them. We think of the evil nature we have inherited, of the bias in our constitution to this or that attractive vice, of the defects of our education, of the violence of temptation, of the compulsion of circumstances; we do not deny what we have done—we cannot—but we mitigate it by every possible plea. This is not walking in the light. In all such self-excusing there is a large element of voluntary self-deception which keeps the life in the dark. To walk in the light requires us to accept our responsibilities without reserve, to own our sin that we may be able to disown it, and not to own it with such qualifications and reserves as amount to saying in the long run, It was indeed I who did it, but after all it is not I who should bear the blame. A man who makes it his business not to confess his sin, but to understand and to explain it, no matter how philosophical he may seem, is walking in darkness, and the truth is not in him. There is nothing in his attitude which gives him the benefit either of fellowship with Christians or of the cleansing blood of Jesus.

Finally, to walk in the light means that when we confess our sins to God we do not keep a secret hold of them in our hearts. Many a man confesses the sin he has done, and knows that he is going to do it again. It is not only in his nature to do it; it is in his inmost desire. He has been found out, exposed, humiliated, punished; yet he is saying to himself, "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." It need not be said that there is no hope here: this is the man who is shut up at last in the iron cage of despair. Where

there is something hidden in the heart, hidden from God and from man, yet with the last word to say in the life, the darkness is as deep and dreadful as it can be. The desire to keep such a secret hold of sin is itself a sin to be confessed, to be declared in its exceeding sinfulness, to be unreservedly renounced; and it is only when the life is brought into the light by such openness that the Christian experiences of which the Apostle speaks are put within its reach. The man who has a guilty secret in his life is a lonely man. There can be no cordial Christian overflow from his heart to the hearts of others, nor from theirs to his. And he is a man doomed to bear in his loneliness the uneffaced stain of his sin. The cleansing virtue of the atonement cannot reach him where he dwells by himself in the dark. He is cut off from the two great blessings of the Gospel which are conditioned by walking in the light—the fellowship of Christians with one another, and the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus. Let us briefly consider these.

2. (*a*) *We have fellowship one with another.*—The fellowship of Christians with each other has its basis in their common fellowship with the Father and the Son, but it is a separate and priceless good. The joy of the Christian religion is largely bound up with it, and without joy there can be little effectiveness, because little attraction or charm. How good it is, and how strengthening, to feel the heart enlarged by sharing in the Christian experiences which are common to all believers! how happy a state, not to be alone in that which is deepest in our life, but to know that there are those who passionately sympathize with us, who feel with us and with whom we can feel, to the

very depths of our spiritual nature! The New Testament epistles are one prolonged illustration of what this fellowship means. It means, to put it briefly, that Christians are people who have in common the interests and experiences which dominate these letters, who are moved and uplifted by them as the Apostles and their correspondents were, who instinctively speak of them as they spoke, and who find in their relation to each other in Christ the most inspiring and joyful element in their life. It is something like this the Apostle means when he says, "We have fellowship one with another". But what of our present experience in this connexion?

It can hardly be doubted that the want of fellowship, in this primary Christian sense, is at this moment one of the greatest wants in the Church's life—the one which is most to be deplored, which more almost than any other makes the Church helpless and exposes it to contempt. Is it not pitiable to see the substitutes that are found for it, and the importance which is assigned to them, only because the real thing is not there? We speak of having "a social meeting" of the Church, as if a meeting could not be social unless its Christian character were disguised or put into the background. We approve of the Literary Society because it keeps young people in contact with the Church, as if this kind of contact had anything to do with the ends for which the Church exists. We congratulate ourselves on the success of a bazaar, because though it did involve an immense amount of labour and of waste, it brought the members of the congregation together, and united them in a common interest over the organ or the renovation of the buildings. We may even find

the choir picnic important, and if we open a reading-room where men may play at dominoes we call it "extending the social side" of the Church's work. How incongruous and unreal all this would look in the first epistle of John! How small and trivial it does look in face of many other fellowships which absorb men in the world around us! The fellowship of the members of a political club in promoting what they think the good of the nation—the fellowship of scholars in the advancement of science—the fellowship of the members of a Trades Union in promoting the material interests of their class—all these are more powerful, more stimulating, more attractive than the small incidental fellowships which seem to be all that is real in some churches. Why is it that the powerful and fundamental fellowship constituted simply by membership in the Church has fallen into the background? Why do we not feel the power and the charm of a common relation to the Father and to His Son Jesus Christ, of a common participation in that eternal life which was with the Father and has been revealed for us in the Son? Why is not this the centre round which we rally, where we find our greatest joy, where we can be most truly one, and are inspired for the highest ends?

According to the Apostle, it is because we do not walk in the light as God is in the light. We sit here side by side, but how far are we really present to each other? How many of us are there who have things to hide? How many who have done what no one knows, and what they have not told unreservedly even to God? How many are there whose minds are quietly and steadily set on something which they dare

not avow, whose future depends on keeping others in the dark, and who do not realize that in the sense of the Apostle the very same act keeps themselves in the dark too? How many are there whose minds have been secretly loosened from what once seemed convictions, who have been intellectually estranged from the Gospel, who would create a sensation if they stood up in the midst of Christian worship and revealed their whole thoughts about God and Christ, about Church and Bible, about prayer and sacraments? These are the things which make fellowship impossible. These are the things which make us dumb, because they silence on our lips the language of the New Testament, the only language which true Christianity can speak. The want of fellowship, if the Apostle is right, constitutes an impeachment of our moral sincerity. If we were walking in the light it would be otherwise. If we always told the truth, if we never made reserves, if we dealt sincerely with God, with one another, and with our own souls, we should have a fellowship with one another such as we have never known; we should speak the language of the Apostles as our mother-tongue, and we should find, not in other associations but in the Church itself, the most satisfying and inspiring society in the world. Walk in the light as God is in the light, and your hearts will open to each other in Him. You will discover on every side unsuspected friends. You will get new inspirations for your Christian life, new impulses and opportunities of sharing in the Christian life of others. The Church will no longer be a weariness to you, a place to which you come with reluctance and which you leave with relief; it will be the home and joy of your heart.

(*b*) The restoration of Christian fellowship is not the only blessing which comes with walking in the light: there is also continuous and progressive sanctification. *The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.* This is not spoken of simply as God's will, as that which He intends shall take place; it is spoken of as actually going on. When they walk in the light, the atoning death of Jesus actually exerts its sanctifying power upon Christians; they become continually purer and more pure from all sin.

It cannot be said too strongly that this is God's interest in the Church. As St. Paul puts it, this is the will of God, even your sanctification. What He is concerned for is that men who have been defiled and stained by sin, men who have been dyed with it through and through, should be completely purified. It is a tremendous task. Think only of the congregation gathered here, and of what sin means in us if we take it in all its forms and dimensions and powers. Think of the sinful passions which are rooted in our nature—what St. John calls the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life. Think of the habits, some of thought and imagination, some of grosser indulgence, which practice has burnt into the blood. Think of the sins of youth and of age; of the pride and wilfulness and folly; of the discontent and querulousness and rebellion; of the sloth and shiftlessness, of the envy and malice and uncharitableness, of the selfishness and ingratitude, of the disobedience and obstinacy, of the insincerity, falsehood, and treachery, of the love of the world and the forgetfulness of God, which are all represented here. Think of the deep stain these things leave, and then consider

that it is the will of God to cleanse us altogether from them, and that He has provided a power which is able to do so. Dreadful as is the power of sin in all its forms and ramifications, there is a power in the world which is still more strong and wonderful—the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. It does not cloak, it cleanses. It purges sin away, and makes the flesh of the leper come again as the flesh of a little child. This is what the Gospel promises, or rather we should say, This is what the Gospel is. It is a stupendous assertion, but the very wonder of it is the evidence of its truth. It is not too good to be true; it is too good and too great not to be true. There are books on the atonement in abundance which, apart from all other arguments, discredit themselves finally by reducing the revelation of God in the Passion of His Son to the poorest moral commonplace. The whole of the New Testament is a protest against this. The atoning death of Jesus is the supreme miracle of grace, and its effects in human nature are no less wonderful than the power by which they are wrought. It cleanses from all sin. It prevails against, overpowers and expels all that has ever degraded and defiled the children of God.

Can we set to our seal that this is true? Is sin surely disappearing from our life and nature under the power of the atonement? Are we who are members of the Church learning day by day that the most powerful thing in the world is not the sin we know so well, but the blood of Christ's cross, and that under this Divine and irresistible influence the dark stain of sin is vanishing away? This is the concern which God has in our life. Others may look on us with inter-

est to see what progress we are making in our business, or in our education, or in our social career; but what God looks at is our progress in being purified from sin. For this purpose was the Son of God manifested; for this purpose He bore our sins in His own body to the tree; and to God this purpose cannot but be as dear as the agony and passion of His Son. Is it as dear to us? Is it the one concern of our life, as it is the supreme interest of God in Christ, that we should be cleansed from all sin? If it is, then we must observe the condition under which the sanctifying power of the atonement becomes effective; we must walk in the light, as He is in the light. I have already explained what this involves, but must repeat part of it here in this new connexion. The atonement is ineffective and indeed uninteresting mainly for two reasons, which though they are the opposite of each other lead alike to walking in the dark. It is not interesting if we are not seriously interested in sin. If sin is regarded with comparative indifference—if it is treated as a slight or superficial matter which we can deal with for ourselves—if the responsibility toward God in which it involves us is not realized—if it is explained and explained away till we do not feel very uneasy, not to say very guilty about it—if we have never learned the power of the bad conscience to paralyze the will—then of course the atonement will seem gratuitous to us, and we will not get experience of its cleansing power. And on the other hand, it is not interesting if we *are* seriously interested in sin. The man who has been compromised with evil and who for reasons of his own intends to continue so —the man who thinks he cannot afford to break finally

with something against which his conscience protests, and is therefore secretly resolved that he will stick to it—this man also can have nothing to do with the atonement. For the atonement means the blood of Christ. It means deliverance by one who died for sin, and whose power is a power enabling us to die to it. It means the inexorable love of God with which evil cannot dwell—a love which must be shut out of his life, though the saving power of God is in it, by every one who, whatever his professions, refuses to treat his sin as what it is to God.

This is why the Apostle puts in the forefront of his wonderful declaration of the Gospel the searching condition—if we walk in the light as He is in the light. There is power in the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin, and there is no power to cleanse us anywhere else, but it needs the condition of openness and sincerity. We cannot be cleansed from the sin we do not confess. We cannot be cleansed from the sin we excuse. We cannot be cleansed from the sin to which we are secretly resolved to cling. And if not from these, then not from any. The Gospel is simple and whole; there is no such thing as negotiation, transaction, or compromise possible in the relations of God and man. Everything is absolute. We may take the Gospel or leave it, but we cannot bargain about it. We may be cleansed from all sin, or from none, but not from some on condition of retaining others. Walk in the light, and all this will be self-evident. Renounce with all your heart everything secret and insincere. Let there be nothing hidden in your life, no unavowed ends, no prevarications, no reserves. Simple truth is the one element in which we can be

united to each other, and in which the redeeming love of God can work for our sanctification. Insincerity, the dark atmosphere in which so many souls live, is in its turn one of the forms of sin from which the blood of Christ cleanses; and as we confess it, and disown it, and bring it to the cleansing blood, it also loses its power. We can learn even to be sincere under the power of the death of Jesus—to hide nothing from God, to practise no delusions on ourselves, to refrain from imposing on others. This is the way in which all the wealth of the Gospel becomes ours; when we walk in it we realize that the Apostles wrote for us, and that the greatest and most wonderful things they say of Christ and His blood are the simple truth.

## MORAL IMPOSSIBILITIES.

"Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils."—
1 CORINTHIANS, X. 21.

WHAT the Apostle means in this saying is evidently that we cannot drink of these two cups simultaneously or consistently, but of course it is in our power to drink of either. There is such a thing in the world as the cup of the Lord, and we can take it in our hands and put it to our lips. To-day many of us have done so. Perhaps it was under a deep sense of what it signified, perhaps with a sort of perplexity in our minds that in a spiritual religion like ours such a place should have been claimed by a material rite. It is certain that many church members have no clear convictions about the sacraments, and are uncomfortable in the celebration of them. They may think in some indistinct fashion that they are symbolical, but they use even the idea of symbol in a wrong way. A symbol in their thoughts is something to be distinguished from reality; just because it is a symbol, it keeps them, one might say, at arm's length from the thing symbolized. But the true use of a symbol is to bring the reality near; it is to give us a grasp of it such as we could not otherwise obtain. A Christian spirit does not play off the reality in the sacrament, and the symbol, against each other; it grasps the reality through the symbol; it does not answer to its experience to say that in the

communion it partakes of the symbols of Christ's body and blood; it has Jesus Christ Himself in all the reality of his incarnation and passion as its meat and drink. It is nothing less than the cup of the Lord which we drink, nothing less than the table of the Lord of which we partake.

The sacraments, no doubt, may easily become encrusted with superstition. They did so even in the days of the Apostles. The Corinthians to whom Paul writes evidently thought the sacraments had a magical power, and could keep them safe even when they ran into spiritual perils and tempted God. The Apostle had to point them by way of warning to ancient Israel, which had also had its sacraments; *they* were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; *they* all had the same spiritual meat, the same spiritual drink; yet they perished in the wilderness. The sacraments are not charms or spells which make any conduct safe. Nevertheless, though superstition may gather round them, they enshrine the ultimate truths of the Christian religion; they safeguard, in a form more impressive and less open to distortion than words, the realities by which faith lives. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? Is it not the cup of the Lord? Is it not He who puts it into our hand? Is not His love in it, the love with which He loved us when He gave His life a ransom, the love which bears sin, and brings regenerating pardon? Is not that love in the cup, here, now, within reach, ours, commended to us by the Lord Himself? If these things are not so, I do not know what the Christian religion means, or how it can subsist; and however men may become be-

wildered in their minds over the fundamental truths of revelation, Christ has in this ordinance a witness to Himself which finds its way to the heart. For generations Protestants have been accustomed to denounce the mass of the Romish Church as idolatrous, superstitious, materialistic, and I know not what else—and all with perfect truth; yet the mass, as every one knows, is the heart of that Church's strength. Why is that so? It is because underneath all the incrustations of materialism, superstition, and priestly assumption, the ultimate truth of the Gospel lies hidden—the truth which the cup of the Lord presents to us—that here and now the love which bears and bears away the sin of the world has come to meet us, and graciously offers itself to us. The Gospel, it might be said, is buried in the mass; but when you have done your worst in this way to the Gospel, you have done no more than to bury it alive; you cannot kill it, and through all encumbering grave clothes it will thrill and subdue and hold the hearts of men. There could be no stauncher Protestant than I, but if Protestant Churches disparage the sacraments, and dissipate the Divine realities to which they bear witness, then the Romish Church, in spite of its superstition and its tyranny, will prevail against them, and it will have a divine right to prevail.

How many among us there are who have none but negative ideas of the Lord's Supper! If they were asked what they believed about it they could hardly say anything except that they did not believe in a real presence anyhow. And yet the cup which we bless is the cup of the Lord! Dear friends, we do not need to believe in a real presence of the Lord in the material elements; probably we cannot; but if we are Chris-

tians at all we must believe in a real presence of the Lord in the celebration of the Supper—a real presence in the sense of the elements and the use to which we put them. We must believe that the table of which we partake is the Lord's table, that the cup which we drink is the Lord's cup. We must believe that the Lord is with us to all the intents and purposes signified by the elements and the actions. He is with us in the virtue of His broken body and His shed blood; He is with us as the Lord who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and made one sacrifice for them for ever; He is with us that the unsearchable power of His atoning love may enter into us, condemning, subduing, annihilating, regenerating; He is with us to impart Himself to us, to be the meat and drink of our souls. We *have* a real presence, a presence which the supper enables us to realize in all its wonderful grace. We have this Divine, this truly supernatural thing, at the heart of our Christian life; it does not rest on the wisdom of man, but on the presence and power of a redeeming God. And this is what we stay ourselves upon when we drink the cup of the Lord, and partake of His table.

The Apostle takes for granted all that has now been said. He contemplates the Corinthians sitting at the Lord's table, making His redeeming love their own, entering into this wonderful union with Him. It is with this in mind that he says, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils." What does he mean by such extraordinary language?

He is thinking of the pagan religions from which the Corinthians had been converted, and amid which

they lived. It was not only the Church which had its sacraments, paganism had sacraments too. The Apostle could see in his mind's eye a company of worshippers go up to the temple of Aphrodite or Apollo. He could see them sprinkled with lustral water, and standing by in sacred silence while the victim was slain in sacrifice; he could see them join in the songs and dances that filled up the time between the sacrifice itself and the preparation of the sacramental meal, and that reflected the religious mood of the festival, whatever it might be; he could see them at last give themselves up to the joy of the meal which crowned the festal day in honour of the god. We know pretty well what this meal was. Aristotle derives the Greek verb which means "to be drunk" from the words which mean "after the sacrifice"; it was a scene of revelling and excess; Paul calls it "the cup of devils," "the table of devils," and pronounces participation in it inconsistent with participation in the table and the cup of the Lord. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils."

The language seems needlessly harsh to some modern readers. It is not easy for those who study what is called comparative religion to think of the religions of ancient Greece as having nothing in them or behind them but powers opposed to God—to think of heathenism as a whole as sustained by forces demonic, not Divine. In the main, this is due to the fact that students of comparative religion are not in contact with these ancient worships as they actually functioned in the lives of men, but only with what they judge to have been the ideal impulses in which they originated. The Apostle speaks of heathenism and its sacraments

as he knew them in relation to his own work, and if his estimate of them is not that of a modern professor of the science of religion, it is just as the estimate of Hinduism which we get from a missionary in Benares is very different from the philosophical representation of Hinduism we get from a student of its sacred books. The two witnesses or interpreters do not contradict each other; they are really speaking of different things. The Corinthians also thought Paul's language harsh, but for a different reason. It was not unjust to the pagan religion, but to them. They knew quite well what a pagan sacrament was, but they felt themselves proof against it, and able to share in it with their old neighbours without getting any harm. Some thought their own sacraments secured them. Some had learned from Paul himself the lesson that an idol is nothing in the world, and armed in that intellectual conviction, or as they might have said in that Christian principle, they thought they could participate in the pagan worship as grown men might in some children's game, without having either their minds or their characters affected by it. It is this fine abstract idea of the power of a principle to shield the soul from moral peril that Paul is afraid of. He knows the Corinthians better than they know themselves, and he knows that they are daring the impossible. No matter how sure a man's hold may be of the Christian principle that an idol is nothing in the world and therefore can do nothing to harm any enlightened person; if he takes part in such a transaction as I have described, then its atmosphere, its circumstances, its spirit, will prevail against him; he will be brought in spite of himself into the great communion of heathen life again.

Let him say what he will, it is another world than that in which we live at the Lord's table; it is spiritual influence of another quality which tells there upon the soul: and the two are irreconcilable. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons".

Our interest, however, is not in the Corinthians and in the Apostle's right to speak as he did to them; it is in the application of his words to ourselves and to the conditions of our own life. Is it necessary to say to *us*, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils"? Are we in any danger of entering into communions which are incompatible with our communion in the blood of Christ?

Surely to ask this question is to answer it. We do not see, indeed, in our streets the temples or the altars of false gods; at least we do not see the names of the false gods written upon them. But that is part of our peril. It is easy enough to say that an idol is nothing in the world—that we do not believe in demons and their influence—but that does not take us very far. It is easy enough, as one of our most brilliant Greek scholars has put it, to say that there are no such persons as Bacchus and Aphrodite; the real question is, Are there no such things? Are there no powers in the world in which we live which are radically and finally hostile to Christ? Is it not as true now as when the New Testament was written that our wrestle is not with flesh and blood—not simply with other human creatures like ourselves, whom we could fight, so to speak, with our hands—but against influences which are far more subtle, pervasive, and powerful than that of another human will—against a poisonous moral atmosphere which chokes the very

life of Christ in the soul? Such an atmosphere was created for the Corinthians by the old heathen worship and its associations, for in Corinth as in Canaan they did their abominations unto their gods; for us, it may be created in other ways, yet be none the less fatal to our communion with Christ. Can we specify any of these ways so as to warn ourselves against them?

Probably the cup of devils is drunk most frequently still under the sign of liberty. Even a Christian man says to himself that everything in human life ought to be of interest to him. It belongs to his intelligence to concern itself with all the experiences of his kind, and the most attractive way to look at these experiences is in literature. This is the mirror in which life is reflected, and it cannot be wrong to gaze into it. It is indeed the mark of a large and liberal intelligence to have the amplest toleration here; to allow the mind to familiarize itself with all that has been said and thought by human beings; to cultivate breadth, appreciation, geniality; to avoid a censorious and puritanic temper. The world that is good enough for God should be good enough for us, and we should not be too good to take it as it is.

It is by pleas like these, or in a mood like this, that men and women who have drunk the cup of the Lord allow themselves to drink the cup of devils. They deliberately breathe a poisoned spiritual air as if it could do them no harm. But it does do harm. I do not believe there is anything in which people are so ready to take liberties which does so much harm. There are bad books in the world, just as there are bad men, and a Christian cannot afford to take either the one or the other into his bosom. There are books,

and books of genius too, which should not be read, because they should never have been written. The first imagination and conception of them was sin, and the sin is revived when they are conceived again in the mind even of a Christian reader. It is revived with all the deadly power that belongs to sin. We cannot give our minds over to it with impunity. It confuses, it stains, it debilitates, it kills. It is the cup of devils, and we cannot drink it and drink the cup of the Lord.

There is a strange persistence in the idea that all things are lawful in this region, and that it is in some way a sign of moral weakness to put a limit to one's liberty. And this makes it the more dangerous. Christ, it was said by some one writing on Pascal, has two great enemies, the god Priapus and the god Pan. You can get to the end of it with the first, the author of this observation thought, but never with the second. You can vanquish sensuality in its gross forms, but can never quite get over the idea that the world is one, and that it can do you no harm to regard everything that is in it, especially when it is presented to you in the form of literature, with indulgent toleration. I say again, it is not true. Such indulgent toleration is the cup of devils, and it can never be compatible with the cup of the Lord. The Lord died for the difference between right and wrong, to which this mental temper would render us indifferent; and we drink of His cup that we may be conformed to His death. No charm of art or genius should prevail with us to breathe an air which is fatal to the soul's health ; rather must we say of such charms, as the law of God said to Israel of the idols of the Canaanites, "Thou shalt not desire *the silver nor the gold that is on them*". Nothing has value for a Christian, he can count nothing but loss, if it

impairs the reality, the certainty, and the worth of his experiences at the table of the Lord.

I dare say some might be found to argue that the violence of Paul's language here is due to idiosyncrasies of the man, and that we find a more serene and impartial look at life in the words of Jesus. The Lord, it may be said, is more genial, and has a more sympathetic appreciation of life as it is. I can only say that this seems to me the very reverse of the truth. The most severe and inexorable things that are said in the New Testament about the impossibility of combining the life of discipleship with any such indulgent toleration of all that men call natural are the things said by Jesus. He is the great teacher of separation, of renunciation, of the cross. The one thing which alarms Him, and calls forth from His love the most passionate warnings, is the disposition in men to believe that nature always has its rights and that we can never go far wrong if we simply recognize them. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." All things are not lawful for us if we wish to remain in the Lord's company and to share in His life. If a man holds the principle that nature is entitled to assert itself through all the impulses implanted in it, and holds it so absolutely that he *will* go wherever his feet can carry him—that he *will* handle whatever his fingers itch to touch—that he *will* glut his eyes with gazing on whatever they crave to see—the result will not be that that

man will have an ampler and a richer character ; it will be that he has no character at all. It will not be an abundant entrance into life, it will be the sinking of an exhausted nature into hell. For creatures such as we are, in a world like this, these, according to the teaching of Jesus, are the alternatives ; and they *are* alternatives. This is the philosophy of Puritanism, when all the liberal criticism of it is over : "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils ; ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of devils". And as surely as we would have Christ and the atonement, the judgment and the mercy of God, the Spirit of holiness and the hope of heaven remain real to us, so surely must we renounce the things which cast on all these the shadow of unreality or insignificance, and neutralize in our life their redeeming power. Dear friends, there *are* such things. We all know them. We have all loved them. We have all feared them. It is our Lord Himself who says to us, "Cut them off, *for your life*".

We read in the seventeenth Psalm of men whose portion in life is of the world, but it is the happiness of those who drink the cup of the Lord that their portion in life is of God. All that is most real to them and most dear is that which is brought home to their hearts at the Lord's table. They think with awe and with exultation of what God is, and of what He has done for us and is giving to us in His Son. They say to themselves, This is the world, this is the environment of realities, in which I must live and move and have my being now. Other things pass, but this remains. Other things are dubious and baffling, but this is sure and clear. The presence which is ever

with us, in the secret of which we have been hidden, under the overshadowing of which we go forth, is the presence of an eternal love which has borne our sins and is calling us to holiness in fellowship with itself. How can we ever forget it? How can it cease to be the motive which inspires and controls all our life? How can we ever be ashamed of it? How can we venture to argue against it, and to excuse ourselves for bringing other things into competition with it? Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Do we think we can face the responsibility of our life if He is not with us? What tempts many to unfaithful accommodation is the dread of standing alone. They do not like to be singular, especially when singularity brings the reproach of being censorious and intolerant, or timid and small minded. But no one is alone who bears any reproach for being true to Christ. It is under these conditions that the Lord comes most near and makes His presence most real to the soul. The jealousy that we might have stirred up against us stirs up itself on our behalf. "I," saith the Lord, "will be a wall of fire round about them." "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." This is our hope when we take in all seriousness the responsibilities of our calling. When we put aside the tempting cups which on all sides are held out to us, it is not to impoverish our life. It is to say, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage. . . . Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

## THE DEADLINESS OF SLANDER.

"Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come."—MATTHEW XII. 31, 32.

IN the Gospel narratives at this point we find two comments made upon Jesus which are almost equally startling, and which suggest that ordinary conceptions of our Lord are in some respects far from the truth. The tradition of Christian art has taught us to think of Jesus as living a life of untroubled calm; His countenance in pictures may be pensive or majestic or compassionate, but it is always in repose. Anything strained or overwrought would seem out of place. But here we see that alike upon friends and enemies He made a different impression. He was rapt, as He taught the multitudes, in a lofty excitement. When He encountered those who were regarded as possessed by evil spirits, the Spirit that was in Him reacted with intense vehemence against their delusions and degradation; the Gospels are full of the peremptory and commanding words that He spoke as He set them free. If we think of a scene like the cleansing of the temple, when zeal for His Father's house consumed Him like a flame; or of His baptism, when He saw the heavens

open and heard the Father's voice; or of the hour when He turned on Peter with the terrible rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; we can feel how untrue is that conception of Jesus which represents Him as immovably placid. Perhaps it would be truer to think of Him as habitually rapt, exalted, intense. Certainly this is how we must think of Him on the occasion on which he is presented to us in the text. It was a condition which baffled the bystanders. His friends said, "He is beside himself"; the scribes from Jerusalem said, "He has an unclean spirit".

This is how it is put in Mark, but there is a striking difference to be noted between the evangelists. Mark does not say anything about the Son of Man; he contrasts blasphemy against the Holy Spirit with sins and blasphemies in general. Matthew on the other hand contrasts it with speaking against the Son of Man. "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come." There are some difficulties about this version of our Lord's words into which it is not necessary to enter here; but assuming it to be reliable, we may be disposed to think that though Mark does not present us in set terms with the contrast which we find in Matthew—the contrast between speaking against the Son of Man and speaking against the Spirit—he does present us with the key to it. Two kinds of sin are in view in Matthew, and both are sins of speech; but though he mentions both, Matthew does not illustrate both. If we had to explain from his Gospel alone, first what is meant by speaking a word against the Son of

Man, and next what is meant by speaking against the Holy Spirit, we should be much at a loss. But Mark, though he does not present us with this contrast, presents us with illustrations which enable us to understand and apply it. The petulant exclamation of the friends of Jesus, as they see how He is rapt and lost in His work—He is beside Himself—there we have the word spoken against the Son of Man; the malignant utterance of the scribes from Jerusalem, as they saw Him relieve the possessed—He has Beelzebub, He is in league with the devil—there we have the word spoken against the Holy Spirit.

It is not necessary to dwell long on the first. A life and work like that of Jesus must often have seemed baffling to those who were about Him and who had a natural affection for Him. We can understand how His mother and His brothers had a true though misplaced concern for His welfare. If there were a son or a brother in our house to whom the one thing real was the kingdom of God, who broke every earthly tie to give himself completely to it, who spent whole nights on the hillside in prayer to God over it, who was so absorbed in it that he could not find time for his necessary food and apparently did not care, should we not be tempted to think that he needed looking after? No doubt the friends of Jesus should have known Him better than they did. They ought to have had greater sympathy with Him, greater appreciation for His work. They ought not to have made it possible for Him to say, with the bitter accent of experience, "A man's foes are they of his own household". But though they sinned in these respects, it was not a hopeless or unpardonable sin. Their hearts

were not really shut against Jesus; they were not deliberately and malignantly opposed to His work. I do not say this as though the sin of their speech could be explained away. If they were alarmed on Jesus' account, they were irritated and annoyed on their own; they were provoked that One who ought to have been able to take care of Himself should persist in causing needless anxiety; and their petulant exclamation, pardonable though it was, was gravely wrong when we remember who was its object. Nevertheless, it was only petulant, not malignant. It was something they could and would be sorry for afterwards; they would repent and it would be forgiven.

Is this speaking against the Son of Man a sin which can be committed now? Sitting in the church, we are perhaps inclined to think that it is not. We cannot stand in the same relation to Jesus as those who were His contemporaries on earth, and it is not possible for us to express impatience or irreverence in the same unthinking way. But it is difficult for anyone who hears or reads much of the unceasing discussion of Jesus which goes on all around us to avoid the impression that speaking against the Son of Man is a common sin. Probably there never was a time when the Gospels were so much read as at present. Jesus is surrounded by multitudes as dense and as deeply interested as ever thronged about Him in Galilee. They look on and listen, and feel free to express their opinions about Him, and often they do it with no sense of what He is and of what they themselves are. They make their comments unembarrassed by reverence. It is not in their minds that Jesus is the Lord, and that in the last resort it is not we who judge Him,

but He who judges us. What is called the purely historical study of the Gospels—as if there were any such thing—is apt to betray into this wrong attitude some who should know better, and who really do know better; and then they may be heard to speak of Jesus in a tone which is painful to Christian feeling and injurious to the Lord Himself. You may catch it often in what are ostentatiously non-Christian or non-theological renderings of the Gospel; but you may catch it also in sermons and in students' essays and in common talk. The friends of Jesus who said "He is beside Himself" had lost for the moment or had not yet attained any real sense of what He was; they spoke of Him as if He were just one of themselves, who in an excess of zeal was like to go off His head. Their attitude is reproduced by a great many people who, without thinking what they are doing, really take the measure of Jesus in their own minds, point out His limitations, assign Him His place, show where and how far He paid tribute to His time,—betray, in short, in their whole relation to Him, the twentieth century's sense of its own superiority to the first. I am not going to deny that the twentieth century is in many ways superior to the first; nor even that it was part of the reality of our Lord's manhood that He should be man of the particular age in which He was born, and not of another; but if we cease to feel through all such distinctions that Jesus is the Lord, we shall run great risk of falling into the sin in question. Do not let us consider it a sin of no consequence because it is pardonable. It is pardonable on the same condition as other sins—namely, that it is repented of, confessed, renounced. To cultivate

reverence of speech where there is no deeper reverence might be a doubtful gain; we know the kind of insincerity which is generated in this way. Nothing is more unpleasant than the piety which thinks it irreverent to speak of Jesus as the Gospels do—the piety of religious etiquette, for example, which always says "our blessed Lord" as if it were a sin to say "Jesus"; but in spite of the risks in this direction, the risks in the other seem to me at present greater. What we need to cultivate is a reverent sense of the greatness of Jesus; or rather, without any conscious cultivation of it, we need so to look at and listen to Him, so to love, trust, and obey Him, that the sense of what He is will grow upon us, resting continually on our hearts, and restraining us from all that is irreverent in thought or word.

But let us turn now to the other sin referred to in the text, that of speaking against or blaspheming the Holy Spirit. As speaking against the Son of Man was illustrated by the impatient outburst, "He is beside Himself"; so blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is illustrated by the fearful words, "He has Beelzebub; he is possessed by the prince of demons". Matthew tells us that at this very time there was brought to Jesus one possessed of a demon, blind and dumb; and that He healed him, so that the blind and dumb both saw and spoke. Jesus Himself was deeply impressed. He was conscious that the power which He exercised in restoring such dreadfully afflicted creatures was power which the Father had given Him. He reverenced God in it. To Him it was the supreme and decisive proof that God was visiting the world for its salvation. "If I by the finger of God am casting out demons, then

the kingdom of God has come to you." It does not matter whether a first century form of thought—that of possession by demons; or a twentieth century form of thought, which would speak of some kind of insanity, is used to describe the facts and to present them to the mind; the facts themselves are indubitable. There was a power which wrought through Jesus, bringing health to the disordered mind, composure to the shattered nerves, purity to the hideous imaginings, God and His peace and joy to lost and terror-stricken souls. If we may say so with reverence, the contemplation of its working filled Jesus Himself with devout joy; He saw in it the pledge of the Father's redeeming presence. It filled the multitudes with unimaginable hope: "Can this," they exclaimed, "be the Son of David? Has the great Deliverer appeared at last?" But the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub. He is in league with the devil. The power He wields is Satanic in its source, and His only aim is to deceive the people."

To understand this, we must remember that this was not the first thought of the scribes about Jesus, nor their first word, but their last. They had had their eye upon Him from the beginning, and they did not like Him. They disliked Him more the more they saw of Him. The earlier part of the Gospel according to Mark exhibits a series of occasions on which they had already come into collision with Him. They were perpetually finding fault with Him and His circle, and were ready on their own side, as theologians perhaps are apt to be, with the charge of blasphemy which is here so solemnly retorted. "Why do Thy disciples fast not? Why do they on the Sabbath day that which

is not lawful? Why doth this man speak thus? He blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only?" The attitude of Jesus to God and to man threatened everything the scribes counted dear. It threatened their conception of religion, and it threatened their religious reputation. If Jesus was right about these things, they were wrong—wrong to the very foundation. No doubt this was a trying position for them. It is hard to admit that we are wrong about the things which are most vital, and it is peculiarly hard when those who have this painful admission to make are the professional teachers of religion, and when they have been convinced of their error by one who has had no professional education, and has only been taught of God. But though it is hard to unlearn and to learn better, it ought not to be impossible. There were scribes whom the study of the Old Testament had prepared to appreciate Jesus. There was one who offered to follow Him wherever He went. There was one who answered Him with such spiritual intelligence as commended His admiration and perhaps His hope; "thou art not far," he said, "from the kingdom of God". But with the majority it was not so. Their early aversion to Jesus deepened into antipathy, and their antipathy settled into malignant hatred. There was nothing they would not do in their implacable antagonism. With His wonderful deeds of mercy under their eyes—with a power at work in Him, before their very faces, which its effects proved indisputably to be the gracious and redeeming power of God—they hardened their hearts and said, "Beelzebub". It was not the exclamation of men who were irritated at the moment and forgot themselves, so to speak; that could have been repented

of and forgiven ; it was the deliberate and settled malice of men who would say anything and do anything rather than yield to the appeal of the good Spirit of God in Jesus. This is the blasphemy against the Spirit, the sin which in its very nature is unpardonable. Jesus calls it eternal sin. It is sin which, look at it as long as you may, is never turned by repentance into anything else ; and therefore it has no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in that which is to come.

The terrible solemnity of these words has oppressed many hearts. People of sensitive conscience have been tormented with the dread that they had committed the unpardonable sin—that without knowing it, or in some hasty but irretrievable word or act, they had placed themselves for ever beyond the reach of mercy. It would be wrong to say anything which encouraged sinful men to think lightly of their sins, but it is surely clear from what has been said already that this fatal sin cannot be committed inadvertently. It is the last degree of antipathy to Christ to which the soul can advance, the sin of those who will do anything rather than recognize in Him the presence of God.

You may think, perhaps, that in this case it is a sin which has very little interest for us—less even than that of speaking a word against the Son of Man. But consider the sin in its nature, as distinct from the particular form in which it was committed by the scribes. They were confronted by the appeal of God's goodness in Jesus, and rather than yield to it they contrived a hideous explanation of it which should render it impotent both for themselves and others. Is this a sin which is so very uncommon ? Or is it not common enough to hear men who are annoyed and reproved by

the good deeds of others ascribe these good deeds to base and unworthy motives, so as to relieve the pressure with which they would otherwise bear on their own consciences? This is the essence of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It is the sin of those who find out bad motives for other people's good actions, so that goodness may be discredited, and its appeal perish, and they themselves and others live on undisturbed by its power. Take one of the most ordinary instances. When a selfish or mean man is confronted by the generosity of another, there is a spontaneous reaction in his moral nature. It is a reaction of admiration. Conscience tells us instinctively that such generosity is good; it is inspired by God; it is worthy of admiration and imitation. But something else in us may speak besides conscience. Perhaps we do not like the man who has done the generous thing; we grudge him the honour and the good will it brings; we would not be sorry to see him discredited a little. Perhaps we are naturally grasping and mean, and our selfish nature resents the reproof of another's generosity. We should be pleased to think he is no better than he need be. We hint at ostentation and the love of praise; we think of ambition, and of the desire to have a party, which is to be conciliated by such gifts; and the generosity of the man is perverted or ignored. It ceases to be a thing which speaks with power for God to us. This, I repeat, is essentially the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is the sin of finding bad motives for good actions, because the good actions condemn us, and we do not want to yield to their appeal. It is the sin of refusing to acknowledge God when he is manifestly there, and of introducing something Satanic to explain and dis-

credit what has unquestionably God behind it. When this temper is indulged, and has its perfect work, the soul has sunk and hardened into a state in which God appeals to it in vain. The presence of Jesus Himself does not subdue it; it only evokes its virulent, rooted, implacable dislike. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit as it is presented to us in the Gospels.

One of the things which disguises it from us, and sometimes even makes it attractive to youthful minds, is that it often assumes the appearance of cleverness. I have spoken of it as the finding of bad motives for good actions. All human actions, we are accustomed to hear, proceed from mixed motives; and to disentangle these motives, to show how largely and how subtly evil mingles with the good, how far what is superficially noble and disinterested has selfishness in some form behind it, is a great part of what some people call the knowledge of human nature. A famous French moralist printed as the motto of his book the following sentence: Our virtues for the most part are but vices in disguise. A penetrating mind, working with this clue, can easily make a brilliant, fascinating, disquieting exhibition of human nature; but it is dangerous and miserable to go out into the world of real life in any such spirit. Pity of the man who thinks that most of the virtue in the world is vice in disguise, whose cleverness is only to unmask the pretender to goodness, whose boast is that *he* is never taken in! In the process of canonization there is a figure called the *Advocatus Diaboli*, the devil's counsel, who states the case against the saint on the principle we have been considering. He finds out all the bad motives which may have prompted all the saint's good

actions, and urges them against his recognition by the Church. It is a poor occupation, and to exercise it in real life is to be really on the devil's side. Though our Lord says to His disciples, "Beware of men, be ye wise as serpents," He never teaches suspicion. It is a sign of spiritual health when we are quick to recognize and to welcome goodness, and our joy in the appreciation of it is one of the surest indications that we ourselves have a place in God's kingdom.

It is in this region that we must look to make the practical application of the solemn words of Jesus. Perhaps you may think I have brought them down to a level at which their solemnity is lost. But it is not so. As I have already pointed out, the stage at which the scribes now stood was not the first stage of their relations to Jesus. They had reached it by degrees. They did not commit the unpardonable sin in a moment of impatience or inadvertence the first time they met Him; they sank into the commission of it as on one occasion after another they indulged their aversion, resented His influence, counteracted His work, perverted His motives. It is in the same way only that anyone can ever come to blaspheme the Spirit, but the solemn possibility remains that in this way this dreadful guilt may still be incurred. Surely we may say emphatically of this as of all sins: Withstand the beginnings. Do not be suspicious of goodness in others. Do not be slow to believe in it, or ready to put an evil construction upon it. Speak no slander, no, nor listen to it. It is the chief of all our happiness and security in the world that we do not become blind to goodness, that we keep alive to the presence of God wherever that presence is manifested in the life of

men, that we open our nature freely and joyfully to the impression of it, that we let ourselves be caught in the stream and carried on by it in the life which is life indeed. If you have a suspicious temper, fight against it; if you think it clever to detect the reality of selfishness or vice behind the virtues of others, suspect yourself; if you have any joy in the exposure of unworthy motives, be afraid. But above everything, if you wish to be remote from this unpardonable sin, rejoice in the work of Jesus. Acquaint yourself with what is being done in His name, and in His spirit and power—with the casting out of evil spirits, with the preaching of the Gospel to the poor, with the mighty works of love which men and women inspired by Him are doing in all the world; acquaint yourself with these things, rejoice in them, promote them, give thanks to God for them; and the thought of the sin against the Holy Spirit will never make you afraid.

## THE ONE RIGHT THING TO DO.

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."—ROMANS IV. 3.
"He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to Him for righteousness."
—GENESIS XV. 6.

THE interest of Abraham's life in the Bible begins when God speaks to him, and when Abraham believes what God said. How God spoke to Abraham, or how He speaks to anyone, we may never be able fully to explain; but if there is a God at all, it is not assuming much to assume that He is able to communicate with His creatures, to assure them of His presence, of His interest in them, of His will on their behalf. We know that in point of fact He can do this. He can impress us with such a sense of obligation as can only be understood as the will of God; He can inspire us with such sublime and solemn hopes as can only be understood as promises of God. Now what the text tells us is that when God has done this—when He has spoken and we have heard His word—there is only one right thing for us to do: to believe Him. It is not right to dispute God's command, or to criticize His promise, or to try to enter into any kind of negotiations with Him about either. His word is absolute and unconditional because it is Divine. It is not right to put anything else into the scale against it, as if, perhaps, it might be outweighed. The only right

thing to do, the only right attitude for the soul to take, is to recognize that in the word which God has spoken, whatever it may be, we are in contact with the final reality in the universe, and to invest our whole life and being in that. When we do so, God counts it to us for righteousness, and it is righteousness. There is nothing in God's counting artificial or unreal. It may be a righteousness of grace—if the word of God is a word of grace it will be so—but it is real righteousness nevertheless. The man is not only reckoned righteous, he is truly right with God, for whom the word that God has spoken is the last reality in life.

The word that God spoke to Abraham was characteristically a word of promise. It is put in various forms at different periods of his life. "I will make of thee a great nation." "Unto thy seed will I give this land." "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to tell them: so shall thy seed be." If we put this in general terms we may say that Abraham had a Divine future held out to him in the word of God. When we are told that he believed God, it means that that Divine future had a reality for him in comparison with which everything else lost both reality and value. He could count all things loss for its sake. He left his country and his kindred for it; he renounced for it the tempting openings which he saw around him, and every future which he might have carved out for himself. We must not forget that the life of Abraham was rich in natural possibilities. He might have had a future in Ur of the Chaldees had he chosen to remain there, and to disbelieve the voice which said, "Get thee out to a land that I will show thee, and I

will make of thee a great nation". No doubt a man of his power and enterprise would have had a career if he had chosen to settle in Sodom or in Egypt, and to renounce the visionary prospect of inheriting Canaan. He could have founded a family and even a powerful line of princes, if he had been content with Ishmael, as he was much inclined to be—O that Ishmael might live before thee!—and had given up looking for the child of promise. But if in face of the word of God he had declined upon any of these alternatives, God could not have counted it to him for righteousness. On the contrary, he would have been all wrong with God. The other things, of course, had a reality of their own which he did not dispute. A home in Haran, or in Egypt, or in the plain of Jordan—a life like that of the Babylonians, or of the Canaanites and Perizzites whom he saw around him in Palestine—military ambitions like those of Chedorlaomer and the allied kings: all these probably meant as much to Abraham as to anyone. But he had had something revealed to him with which in reality and value none of them could compete: the future held out in the promise of God. To believe in this, though it meant to count unreal all that was most real to other men, was the only right thing to do; and as Abraham lived out his long life still believing, still counting God's promise the final reality, it made and kept him right with God. He stood before God justified by his faith, a man with whom God was well pleased, the friend of God.

Every one must have noticed how much there is in the New Testament about Abraham and his faith. The reason is that for those who wrote the New

Testament Abraham is the type of true piety. He is the ideal of religion, we might almost say the pattern Christian, and apostolic Christianity finds its own attitude to God anticipated or reflected in him. All the New Testament writers who wish to prove anything about true religion say, "Look at Abraham". Paul does it in this passage, and then again in the epistle to the Galatians. James does it in the well-known discussion of faith and works in which he is often supposed to be controverting Paul. The writer to the Hebrews does it in sublime and memorable words which will recur to every one. The reason of this is that in true religion there is one thing which never changes—the attitude of the soul to God; and that right attitude of the soul to God, on which religion depends for its very existence, is perfectly illustrated in Abraham. God may make Himself known more fully in one generation than in another; His word may be more articulate, more explicit in its command, more spiritual and far-reaching in its promise; but the one thing which it requires under all circumstances is that which it found in Abraham—to be treated as the last and absolute reality in life. So to treat it is to take our place among the children of Abraham; it is to believe God in the sense of this text, the sense which makes and keeps us right with Him.

The one condition on which this text has any interest for us is that God should have spoken to us also, and by doing so made an appeal for faith. It is the assumption of true religion in all its stages that He has spoken. In the old Scots Confession of Faith drawn up at the Reformation, one of the most interesting chapters is headed, "Of the revelation of the promise".

The original form of the promise, according to the Confession, is preserved in the third chapter of Genesis: the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. It is the primary form of faith to believe that good will eventually triumph over evil, nay that man himself, by the help of God, will destroy the works of the devil. But the promise, the Confession proceeds to tell us, was repeated and made more clear from time to time, till at last it has been made perfectly clear to us in "the joyfull daie of Christ Jesus". This is the point on which our interest has to be concentrated. We may not know how God spoke to Abraham, nor how Abraham was so sure that it was God who spoke, but we know that Christ is God's word to us. What does it mean? What revelation of God comes in it calling for our faith? It means that the last reality in the world, the final truth of God, is redeeming love, a love that bears sin in the agony and passion of the garden and the cross, and holds fast to men through it all. What does it promise? What is the Divine future which is held out to us in it? It promises that we shall be sons of God, transfigured with the holiness and glory of the only-begotten from the Father. The Apostles were not afraid to believe this, or if they were, the gracious revelation triumphed over their fears and enabled them not only to believe it for a moment, but to live by their faith. What stupendous things they say in faith, and with what simplicity! "We shall be like Him," says St. John. "We shall wear the image of the heavenly," says St. Paul. This is the true confession of Christian faith, the height to which the heart can rise in men who have heard the voice of God in Jesus, and taken in all that it means. And do we not know in

our hearts that these are the men who are right with God? If we ask what His word requires, must we not say that it requires to be believed? The one right thing to do in presence of the revelation and appeal of God in Christ is to stake our life upon it for good and all. This was what Abraham did when he believed God, and this is always what faith means in the Bible. Without it, it is impossible to please God; but where He finds it, He asks for nothing more. He counts His faith to the believer for righteousness; and in very truth the man who so believes is right with God. God and that man are pledged to each other without reserve, and if it is a sinful man it is a redeeming God, and the future is sure. "We shall be like Him."

But all men, as St. Paul says in a solemn sentence elsewhere, have not faith. They have not all staked their life on the revelation of God in Christ. Redeeming love is not for all the last reality in the universe, for which everything else is counted loss. Many live in worlds of their own which are by comparison unreal. Some are happy, others miserable; but none are right with God.

There are men who live, it may be said, on the level of nature rather than of the Divine revelation, and who are tolerably content with it. God promised a Divine future to Abraham, and many a man in Abraham's place would never have given it a second thought. It was shadowy enough anyhow, and Abraham had already in his possession things which were comparatively valuable and real. He had a fair worldly position, and it was capable of improvement. He was rich in slaves and cattle, in silver and gold. He had the re-

spect of the society amid which he moved, and no doubt knew its worth. Why should he give up all or any of this for the doubtful future offered to him by God? Something like this is in the minds of many people who do not take the Gospel seriously. Their life as it is, without the word and promise of God in Christ, is real enough, and yields considerable satisfaction. Their business is real, and the interest they have in it engages their thoughts sufficiently. Their family life is real, and the affections are their own reward. Their intellectual interests are real; they find a true enlargement and refinement of their natures in literature, science, and art. Even their politics may be real, not to say absorbing. But if it be true that into this world of human life with all its interests and rewards God has come, revealing and promising something which transcends them all, does not that make a difference? If God has really spoken to us in Christ, if He has shown us in Christ what He not only wishes us to be, but what it is in His purpose and power to make us, is it possible for any man, however honourable and satisfying his life may be, to be right with God, and yet not to take His word to us in Christ seriously? Is it possible at the same time to be right with God and to ignore Him? I say it is not possible. God is present, no doubt, in all the world, in that whole order of things in which human life with all its interests goes on. We live and move and have our being in Him; and He is present, so far, in many a life which is unconscious of what it owes Him. But He offers us in Christ far more than this presence of which we may be unconscious; He offers us a redeeming and transfiguring presence to be consciously made ours through faith.

He offers to lift our being, in spite of what we have made it, to the plane and power which we have seen in Christ. Can we ever be anything but wrong with God as long as we ignore this, and prefer to the Divine future held out in Christ—a future which abides for ever—the fast vanishing present, however satisfying, for the moment, it may be? Can we ever be anything but wrong with God as long as we ignore the fact that everything else we have is infinitely outweighed in worth by Christ, while Christ is nevertheless regarded by us with indifference? And can life be worth having unless at bottom we are right with God?

Sometimes this life on the level of nature hardens through content into complacency and self-sufficiency, and the revelation of God in Christ is encountered by its worst enemy, the most absolute antagonist of faith, Pharisaism. What Pharisaism means at bottom is that man is independent of God, and can even make God his debtor. The Pharisee comes before God clothed in a righteousness of his own, a character and life for which he is prepared to take the responsibility himself, and virtually challenges God's approbation. But how can a man assume such an attitude to God? If the final revelation of God is made, as the New Testament shows, at the cross of Jesus, is not such an attitude once for all impossible? Can a man stand in the presence of that Passion, can he realize what God's eternal love has done and is doing and will ever do for the redemption of our fallen race, and think himself right with God though he ignores it all and takes the whole responsibility of his life alone? You may think that there is no Pharisaism like this in the

world, but do not be too sure. I believe there are many people, even in the Church, to whom the idea of becoming indebted to Christ is profoundly disagreeable ; and because it is, they evade the final revelation of God in His crucified and risen Son, and without shaping their thoughts very definitely hold by the Pharisaic conviction that somehow or other they will be able to answer for themselves. They do not take the word of God in Christ seriously. They do not believe it, as Abraham did when God spoke to him. The final reality is not for them what it is for God, and hence they can never be right with Him. When they read their Bibles everything is out of focus, and naturally they cease to read what they cannot understand. But it was a Pharisee of the Pharisees who saw more clearly than any of the Apostles that in faith boasting is excluded; and even the Pharisee will become right with God if he stands by the cross of Jesus till the power of that Divine passion descends into his heart and reveals itself to him as the first and last reality in the world.

But there is another world still in which we may live, not despising faith like the Pharisee, nor ignoring it like the unreflecting man who takes life as he finds it, but dismayed by it as too hard, or incredulous of it, as too good. When the meaning of the word of God in Christ begins to break upon our souls, we may well be overwhelmed by its greatness ; it holds out a Divine future, no doubt, but who can believe it is a future meant for us ? Christ is in the world, the living word and promise of God ; and as we look at Him, we hear God's voice assure us that we shall be like Him. This is the Gospel. Only God could inspire a hope so

wonderful; but when we think of it, is it not too wonderful? is it not quite incredible? *We* like *Him? We* conformed to the image of *God's Son?* We know in part what we are. We are sorrowfully acquainted with passions that degrade us in our own eyes; our imaginations have been haunted with unholy things; shall *we* be like *Him?* We have fits of vicious or sullen temper when we stab with wicked words even those whom we love; is it really meant that these shall cease, and that we shall be clothed in the meekness and gentleness of Jesus? We are selfish, grasping, unwilling to part with money or to take trouble for others; is it really meant that for us it will be more blessed to give than to receive? We are inconstant and half hearted in all our efforts to be good; we run well, perhaps, for a little, but cannot run with patience a long or trying race; is it the very truth of God that this weakness will be overcome, and that we shall endure to the end, and by endurance win our souls? Yes, that is the Divine truth; that is the word and promise of God in Christ, in whom the eternal redeeming love of the Father has been revealed as the ultimate reality in the universe. But how easy it is and how common for apathy and despair to assert themselves against it. Men say to themselves, "It is no use talking: I can never be anything but what I am. God cannot make *me* pure. He cannot make me free. He cannot make me glad. He cannot put a new song in my mouth. He cannot make the eighth chapter of Romans the natural expression of my experience. It only needs to be imagined to be pronounced impossible." It is indeed no use talking; but the word of God in Christ, on which everything here turns, is

not talking; it is the revelation of the ultimate reality and power in the world. The God who is revealed there is spoken of in this very chapter of Romans as one who calls things that are not as though they were: not meaning that He speaks of them as existing though they do not exist, but that while as yet they have no existence He speaks of them in that creative voice which called the worlds into being and has not lost its power. We do not believe in God at all unless we believe in One whose word can work this wonder; and when we reflect that the redeeming love revealed in Christ has omnipotence at its command, dare we doubt what we are called to do? What do we believe is the final reality? What is going to survive and reign when everything else has passed away? Is it the flesh, the bad conscience, the impotent will, the worm that dies not and the fire that is not quenched? Are we to stake our life on these, or on the redeeming love of God which has come to us in His Son, and on the new creature to be created by it in God's likeness? Do we believe in what we are as the ultimate reality, or is not the eternal love of God which appeals to us in Christ more real, and able to change us into His image? It is only this last belief which does justice to God, and makes us right with Him. It is this only which He can count to us as righteousness. It is this which is the faith by which men are justified and saved.

This text is one of many which suggest to us two characteristics of the true religion much insisted on in Scripture—its simplicity, and the absoluteness of its requirement. When God speaks, He demands to be taken at His word; no more than this, but also no less. His word is not proposed as a basis of negotia-

tion or discussion; it can neither be abridged nor supplemented. To apply this to the Christian stage of revelation: redeeming love, displayed in the crucified Christ, is the sum of God's word to the world; and all that that word demands from those who would be right with God is the final and unconditional abandonment of the soul to the redeeming love itself. I do not believe that anyone ever got a real sight of Christ and of God's redeeming love in Him without becoming conscious that there is something in it which with all its graciousness is peremptory and inexorable. There is that in the Gospel with which no one is allowed to argue. All we can do is to believe, in the sense of the text, or to disbelieve; to give it in our life the place of the final reality to which everything else must give way, or to refuse it that place. Many people are not clear about this. They would like to talk the word of God over. It raises in their minds various questions they would willingly discuss. It has aspects of interest and of difficulty which call for consideration: and so on. Perhaps there are some who confusedly shield themselves against the responsibilities of faith and unbelief by such thoughts. All that such thoughts prove, however, is that those who cherish them have never yet realized that what we are dealing with in the Gospel is *God*. When God speaks in Christ He reveals His gracious will without qualification, and without qualification we have to believe in it, or to refuse our belief, and so to decide once for all the controversy between ourselves and Him. God has not come into the world in Christ—Christ has not hung upon the cross bearing the sin of the world—to be talked about, but to become the supreme reality in the life of men, or to

be excluded from that place. To believe is to fall in unconditionally with the purpose of God. It is to fix our eyes on Christ and say, There is the supreme and final reality in the universe for me ; there is that which for me is more real than all the world has to offer ; yes, more real than the terrible reality of sin which till now has dwarfed and annulled every other reality in my life ; there is that to which I must and will and do cling in spite of all appearances, in spite of my unworthiness, in spite of everything in my nature which questions or resents it. This is faith ; it is believing God, and when we so believe Him, He counts it to us for righteousness. He cannot ask from us anything more or less or other than faith. It is the one thing which does justice alike to Him and to us. It is not a part of Christianity, but the whole of it. It has the hope and power of all moral attainment in it, and it only needs to have its perfect work to make God's unspeakable promise good.

## RIVAL PATHS TO PERFECTION.

"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?"—GALATIANS III. 3.

WHAT is before the Apostle's mind as he writes these words is the conversion of the Galatians and their religious relapse. Once they had been pagans, worshipping gods that were no gods with a merely ritual service—in bondage to "weak and beggarly elements," which whatever else it means, means enslaved by some sort of religious materialism. Suddenly Paul appeared among them with his Gospel. He held up Christ on His cross: "placarded" Him, as he says in this chapter, before their eyes. He held Him up in the character described in his very first sentence, as one "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from this present evil world." The sight of Christ crucified arrested them as it has arrested innumerable hearts since. They were fascinated by it; for the time they were spell-bound. Christ entered into their souls in the power of His passion; He lived in them, and they died to their old selves and lived in Him. Old things passed away, and all things became new. This is the beginning, and if we only understood, it is also the middle and the end of Christianity. Nothing has any right to a place in it but Christ, the Christ who died for us, and the reactions of the soul under His influence. Christ crucified and the soul's response to Him are the whole

of the true Christian religion. This is the experience which is meant in the New Testament by receiving the Spirit. The creeds teach us to believe in the Holy Spirit, but that is an expression foreign to the New Testament; the Spirit was not a belief, but an experience, of the early Christian. It was his first experience. He began in the Spirit. His new life started as an inspiration, an experience of uplifting, liberty, and power. Its predominant manifestations might be emotional, intellectual, or ethical, but its standing mark was originality. Where the Spirit of the Lord was there was liberty. The Spirit was subject to no law but that which was involved in its own nature; there was no motive for that which it dictated but the motives operating through Christ crucified. Everything statutory disappeared from religion. Christ was the end of law to those who came under His power. Religious materialism and religious routine were abolished.

But Paul was not the only preacher who appeared in Galatia. He had hardly left the country when others appeared in his track. They had a new "placard" to exhibit, and they were not afraid to raise it side by side with the Apostle's Christ crucified. It was a placard on which were engrossed the countless formal precepts of the Jewish law—its covenant badge of circumcision—its sacred calendar, with its days, and months, and seasons, and years—its distinctions of food into clean and unclean—its whole system of visible, statutory, outwardly imposed ordinances in which the religious life was to be embodied and expressed. Strange as it may seem, passing strange as it certainly seemed to the Apostle, this placard also had its fascination. It exerted a malignant spell over the Galatians

which checked if it did not neutralize the beneficent spell of the cross. They actually thought they were making progress, reaching a higher stage of religion, when the gracious power of the cross which had worked their spiritual emancipation ceased to be felt; and when, instead of exulting in the liberty and responsibility which it had brought, they were scrupulous about rites and ceremonies, times and seasons, and in general about laws which were not inspired but imposed. The Apostle, who was their spiritual father, was alarmed and distressed. He could not understand such an unchristian relapse. *This* progress! he exclaims; *this* a step towards perfection! Can folly go so far? Having begun *in the Spirit*, with a great inward liberation, renewal, and reinforcement of life wrought by God through Christ crucified, can you imagine that you are carrying your Christian life to perfection when you abandon all this, and submit once more to statutory observances that only touch the outer life, or to put it a little scornfully, *the flesh?*

This is the situation which the verse presents to us, and we may generalize it in order to apply it to ourselves. Religion begins in inspiration, that is, in enthusiastic inner freedom begotten by Christ in the soul, and owning an absolute responsibility to Him, and to Him alone; but it is only too apt to belie its origin and its true nature, and instead of cherishing inspiration and liberty as the very breath of its life, to relapse into fixity, ceremonial and routine, and actually to glorify these as the authentic tokens of the Divine. Let us look at some illustrations of this.

1. The most conspicuous, perhaps, is to be found in the sphere of thought. A free-thinker is a name of

evil import in the Christian Church, yet when we think of it, no men were ever so free in their thinking as those who wrote the New Testament. Whatever else the New Testament is, it is the most original book in the world. The mind of the Apostles was inconceivably stimulated by the impression made on it by Christ: I cannot think of anything which gives one so vivid a sense of intelligence working at high pressure, and seeing new worlds of truth open before it while it works, as some parts of the epistles. It is no exaggeration to say that Paul and John were the most daring free-thinkers who ever lived. They had no creed or catechism to follow: they do not quote anyone, hardly even Jesus Himself; they were not "sound" in any traditional sense, but original; they were not orthodox, but inspired. They reconstruct the whole world in thought for themselves, with Christ as its Alpha and Omega, its source, its centre, and its goal. Nobody had done this before, and no outward law imposed such thoughts upon them; they were thoughts freely produced from within by men who felt that they were both free and bound to think and speak as they did.

This liberty of mind, if we do not like to call it freedom of thought, is not inconsistent with a harmonious witness to Jesus, but it enables the Apostles to combine variety with unity, and to bring out different elements in the unsearchable riches of Christ. The fundamental unity of the apostolic religion is unquestionable: it is one and the same Christ who is Lord and Saviour to all who speak to us in the New Testament. But though Christ is the same in all, yet to Paul He is predominantly the Christ who atones for sin and brings the gift of a Divine righteousness; to John, He is the

Son who reveals the Father and communicates eternal life; to James, He is the Lawgiver and the Judge; to Peter, the Author of immortal hope; and in Hebrews, the great High Priest of humanity. These conceptions do not contradict, they supplement each other; but they rose in the minds of the Apostles only as they stood in the presence of Christ crucified, and let His influence tell upon them unchecked and untroubled by any authority from without. The wealth and the liberty go together. And it is the same when we think of the intellectual reconstruction of the world in the epistle to the Colossians. Only a mind which was absolutely free, and which experienced at the same time an irresistible compulsion in the revelation of God in Christ crucified, could have ventured to give a new interpretation of the universe in the light cast by the cross.

But though this intellectual freedom, which is illustrated on every page of the New Testament, is the proper attribute of Christian minds—the atmosphere in which they live and move and have their being—how many there are in the Church who seem to be fascinated by the very opposite. What they think indispensable, what they pride themselves upon, is not inspiration, not the stimulation of intelligence by the crucified Christ, but orthodoxy, soundness, fidelity to a formula in which the truth has once for all been embodied, and which is never to be subject to reflection or revision any more. They chain themselves to some form of sound words, and find in this a guarantee that they are in the ideal Christian position. They accept some creed as a law of faith, a statute imposed upon them by the authority of the Church, and everything

turns for them on unwavering fidelity to this. But the Church of any given age is an assembly of fallible men; and no one who knows what it is to "begin in the Spirit"—no one who has experienced that deep-reaching, all-embracing emancipation which comes to the intelligence as to the moral nature when the power of Christ's passion descends into it—can ever identify a law of the Church *simpliciter* with the truth of God. It does not matter whether it issues from Nicæa or Augsburg, from Trent or Westminster. The mind that has been fascinated by Christ Himself, and that has begun to know what He is by its own experience of what He does, must never barter that original quickening and emancipation, and what it learns by them, for any doctrine defined by man. It is a false progress that is promoted by unbending conformity to creeds and confessions. The only way to become perfect is to cherish the initial liberating impulse, to keep our being open to the whole stimulus of Christ, to grow and still to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. There is nothing statutory in the Christian life, and of all the regions of life the intellectual is that in which statute is most signally out of place.

2. Another instance of the working of the same principle is seen in the tendency to stereotype Christian experience, and to demand that in all natures it shall assume precisely the same forms. What is produced in the human soul when Christ crucified is placarded before it? Sometimes there is apparently a prevailing type of experience: in the great revival of the eighteenth century, for example, there was often an overpowering sense of sin, which was suddenly swallowed up in a great joy and peace in believing.

Perhaps, indeed, such types are not so prevalent as at the time they seem to be; for during a revival there is a tendency for all who are affected to interpret their experience according to the established formula, and to exhibit it, so to speak, cast in a mould which may in some cases really be incongruous to it. But in any case we know that there are other types. The spell of Christ crucified may exert itself in other ways; it may exhibit its power in a new hungering and thirsting after righteousness, in a longing to see the sovereignty of the Lord realized in human society, in a strange new birth of love in the soul. Such new or divergent experiences are not to be distrusted: the one thing we have to distrust is fixity, the tying down of the cross to one particular mode of exercising its power. Theological books used to have a long section headed *Ordo salutis*, the way of salvation. It discussed in what was supposed to be the normal order such subjects as calling, illumination, conversion, repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, the mystical union, sanctification. It might seem the very region in which every thing was sure to be real, because it rested on experience throughout; but often it was vitiated and made unreal just because it shrank from giving experience its due. Its wish and tendency was to reduce experience to one type: to show that every one who was a real Christian must have had the proper experiences in the only proper order. But the wind bloweth where it listeth, and the freedom of the Spirit is not to be limited by any assumed way of salvation. In grace there is the infinite variety which living nature itself presents; and the way of perfection is not to reduce all genuine Christianity to what *we*

think the true pattern, but to trust and recognize as genuinely Christian all experiences which men owe to Christ. It may easily be the one crucified Lord Who begets in some souls the passion of contrition and the joy of faith, and in others the passion of love for the sinful and wretched, and joy in working for the kingdom. The only thing to be trusted is experience, and we must take care not to distrust it on the ground that we have the measure of all true Christian experience already in our hands, and can now impose that measure as a law. We cannot. There is no such all-comprehending law known to us, and familiar or unfamiliar we must welcome everything that Christ inspires.

3. The same reflections are suggested, and we must let the same considerations weigh with us, in regard to Christian worship. Worship is a function of the Church, and in its worship, as in its thinking, the Church began "in the Spirit." Everything in its worship was original, and every one might contribute to it as the Spirit impelled him. "When ye come together," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation". The Apostle does not blame this nor repress it; he only attempts to regulate it. He lays down the laws, which are themselves suggested by the Spirit, of edification and decorum. Nothing is to have a place in worship that does not build up the Church, or that is in itself unseemly. But short of this, worship is free; and the larger the number who contribute to it and the more original and independent their contributions are, the more perfect is the worship. Paul dreaded the imposition of re-

strictions. "Quench not the Spirit," he said, with this very danger in view. Do not pour cold water on your fervent brother when he makes his contribution to prayer or exhortation, even though you think the fire of his devotion a little smoky. It will burn itself clear, but it is poor policy to put it out.

The quenching of the Spirit in worship, however—the relapse in the Church's collective confession of God and testimony to Him from inspiration to routine—is the most constant feature of its history. It is one long story of what began in the Spirit trying to make itself perfect in the flesh. At a very early period modes of worship became fixed—perhaps, to begin with, modes of the celebration of the sacraments. Eventually, however, laws were made for every part of the Church service. The prayers to be said, the Psalms to be sung, the Scriptures to be read, were all fixed; often it was fixed by custom if not by law, that the preacher should preach from the Scripture that had been read. Nothing was left to inspiration at all. There was no point at which the Spirit could manifest itself even if it would. No one would say that there are no advantages in this. It is an advantage to be protected against arbitrariness and caprice. It is an advantage to have noble forms of worship, even if we have no more, and not to be at the mercy of people who possibly are not always inspired. It is more than an advantage, it is a necessity, to have some element of orderly habit in everything which is to last. But surely we should have said beforehand that no one could think that to be tied to such forms, unable to vary them or to do anything outside of them, was the way to perfection. Yet strange to say this *is* what

many think, and there is nothing that shocks them more—nothing, as they would say, that is more offensive to their conscience as loyal church people—than the idea of modifying the use and wont of worship. How eloquent they can be about its accumulated associations, its sacred memories, its venerable authority. One Church is conscious of this in another, but not so readily in itself. Presbyterians are astounded and amused when they read in the life of a Tractarian bishop of Salisbury that he had such a reverence for the order established in the Church that he would not allow any deviation from it: would not use liberty, even when the law allowed it, as in choosing readings for harvest thanksgiving services, or in omitting the long exhortation in the Prayer Book at early communion; nay, as his biographer Canon Liddon tells us, "he would not allow his chaplains to follow the modern fashion of leaving off bands". But Presbyterians can see these things without looking beyond their own borders. Even those who are not old can remember what strange things have been said and done in the name of purity of worship, as if purity meant petrifaction. Men have objected to beginning public worship with prayer instead of with praise. They have objected to the use of hymns in public worship as if it were a sin now to sing a new song to the Lord. Certainly worship ought to be pure, but the only pure worship is worship in Spirit and in truth. The more it is inspired, the more certainly will we have new songs, new prayers, new testimonies, whenever the Church meets; the body of Christ will be built up in its worship by that which every joint supplies.

I do not think it can be questioned that the absence

of this freedom in worship—or to use the Apostle's expression, the quenching of the Spirit, and the desire to attain under law and routine the perfection which can only be reached through inspiration—is an evil which is deeply felt and from which the Church is at present suffering severely. Few Church members realize what large numbers of people there are whose hearts have been touched and quickened by Christ crucified—who have responded to the appeal of His love—who have in short "begun in the Spirit"—but who are outside of the fellowship of the Churches because they could not enter without having the Spirit quenched. They associate with each other in meetings of their own, where they can impart to each other some spiritual gift; in the absence of forms they are far more like a New Testament Church than any of the organized denominations; and though they have often the drawbacks of a defective education, they contain a great deal of the most vital and valuable Christianity of the country. The Churches have lost much, which, by abandoning their original freedom, have made it impossible for such Christians to remain within their borders. They ought to make room for them. A meeting in which there is a liberty of prayer and a liberty of prophesying—in which Christian devotion can be expressed, or Christian interests and duties discussed, by every member of the community—in which the free Spirit can have free course through those whom it has quickened to spiritual issues, is indispensable in the Church if it is to fulfil its ideal. It began and is always beginning anew in the Spirit, and it will never be made perfect in the flesh. It began and is

always beginning anew in enthusiasm and liberty, and it will never be made perfect by routine.

4. The largest application which could be made of the text would be to Christian conduct in general. The perfect life, in the Christian sense, is that which is at every moment inspired—that in which statute is abolished and conventions have no more power. Nothing could be less like Christian perfection than what has sometimes been specially designated the perfect life, namely, a life controlled at every point by monastic rules. The obedience of the monk, who has given his will away to a system if not to a superior, is not the path to perfection; it is a kind of moral suicide. It has a real analogue outside of monasteries in the timid scrupulosity to which everything new is wrong, and in the stolid conscientiousness which without troubling itself about the opinions or the needs of others restricts itself to the observance of established conventions. We do not need to say or to think that the goodness of such people is of no value or serves no purpose. Perhaps it acts in the moral world as the mass of small investors does in the economic world: it maintains a sort of equilibrium; respectable people are not so easily disturbed and thrown off their balance; it would be too much for them if all the Lord's people were prophets. But whatever their value, no one can pretend that the path to perfection is to be found in stereotyping ways of being good or of doing good. Even one *good* custom can corrupt the world, and only customs which in the strictest sense can become second nature have a right to last as long as nature itself. The true path to perfection is that of

inspiration: it is the path revealed to those who stand in the presence of Christ crucified and to whom everything is legitimate—yes, and obligatory—which finds its motive there.

To refer to only one illustration of this. Every one is aware of the degree of ineffectiveness which at present marks the Church's efforts to do good to the world. An immense amount of effort seems to be put forth with no adequate result. Those who have a real connexion with the Church and who take a real interest in it are few. To a large extent it seems to be beating the air, and even among its sincere members there are many who have little sense that they stand for anything inspired and inspiring. Is not that in great measure because the Church, in a world in which everything is alive and moving, has sunk too much from inspiration to routine? It goes on doing what it once did with effect, but what is effective no longer, because all around it has changed. We want to discover, not a new Gospel, but new ways of reaching man with the Gospel; a new intellectual construction of it which will answer to the ideals of truth and knowledge in the mind of our own time—a new utterance for it in the language of those to whom it is preached—new ways of helping the poor—new ways of exerting an influence on the social life in which we all share—new modes of approaching those who need the Gospel but do not want it; a new gift of inspiration, in short, telling on our life in every direction. This is the way to perfection, and to apply it to our methods of worship and of work is entirely in the line of the Apostle's thought. Perfection does not come by statute. It does not come by adherence to routine.

It does not come by reverence for use and wont, however hallowed and venerable. It comes by receiving the Spirit, and the Spirit is received at the cross. It enters into us as we come under the spell of that great love, and as it enters it makes us free. We are born again into newness of life, and it is in that newness perpetually renewed, and not in the oldness of the letter—not in any fidelity to established rules or usages —that we are to serve God. Only as we stand in the presence of Christ crucified, and looking out on the world and its needs feel that we are at once free and bound to serve it in every way which the love kindled in us by the cross inspires, are we in the truly Christian attitude. It is the attitude in which goodness is not imposed, but creative. It is the attitude of the new man for whom all that is old has passed away. The blighting power of routine has passed, and in the new life of the Spirit, with its enthusiasm and liberty, the hope of perfection is opened to us at last.

## A GOOD WORK.

"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on His head."—MARK XIV. 3.

THE story of the anointing at Bethany, an incident which deeply moved Jesus and which shines out with a radiance of its own even on the pages of the Gospel, is set by the evangelist in a very sombre frame. In itself the outburst of a great devotion to Jesus, it is preceded by an account of the malignity of His enemies, and followed by that of the treachery of one of His friends. The chief priests and the scribes, we are told at the beginning of the chapter, sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death. The one thing which embarrassed them was the presence in Jerusalem of the Galilean admirers of Jesus; if any violence were attempted there might be a popular rising in His favour. From this embarrassment they were delivered by Judas. The assistance of one of the twelve enabled them to act with speed and secrecy; perhaps they thought it would also do something to discredit Jesus with the multitude, when His own followers turned against Him. It is apparent from the fourth Gospel that the promptitude with which Judas acted was not unconnected with the incident at Bethany: Judas was prominent among those who

misread the act of Mary, and exposed themselves to the Lord's rebuke. But I do not propose to discuss either his character in general or his immediate motive in betraying Jesus. I cannot overcome the feeling that there is something morally unwholesome and insincere in all speculative discussions of this sort. They are exercises of moral ingenuity upon a subject which is exhibited in Scripture to excite moral horror. They are attempts to revise a sentence from which there is no appeal: "Good were it for that man if he had never been born". The interest of the references to Judas here is only that his conduct serves as a foil to that of Mary.

It was in the circumstances just described, while the net of His enemies was swiftly closing in upon Him, that Jesus was entertained at Bethany by a circle of His friends. It is not easy to say how far they appreciated the circumstances, or had any definite idea of what was impending. On the way to Jerusalem He had repeatedly spoken of His death, but if there were those among His disciples who had an uneasy sense of something ominous in the air, there were those also who thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. To all intents and purposes Jesus was alone. He sat among His friends, but His mind was absorbed in thoughts which most of them did not divine. This is one of the trials of life which has in its measure to be borne by all. We have to live, to take our part in bright scenes, to see smiling faces and listen to cheerful voices, while our hearts are sad within us, and death unseen by others is at our door. We may be sure that no shadow was cast on the company by the preoccupation of Jesus with what was about to

befall Him; He would bear His own burden and not obtrude His anxiety on others. But there must have been a certain tension of feeling in the company; and its pressure in one heart was relieved by the act described in the text. "There came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on His head." Anointing is not a Western custom, and the use of such perfumes is rather counted unmanly among us, but in the East it was otherwise. In the hot and stifling climate it was grateful and refreshing, and to anoint one's guests was an ordinary courtesy the neglect of which was noticed and felt by Jesus. But this was no ordinary anointing. It was distinguished by the costliness of the perfume, and by the lavish generosity with which it was poured out. Not a word was said; the act itself said all that was necessary to those who were worthy to understand it. An ancient Greek poet describes his poems as "having a voice for the intelligent," and this woman's act has the character of a poem. It has "the loveliness of perfect deeds, more strong than all poetic thought". In some way it must have come from a sense of debt to Jesus. Mary owed to the Lord what she could never repay. She had sat at His feet and heard His word. She had received her brother again from the dead; she had herself received the life eternal. She had a finer sense than others that Jesus could not be with them long, and she must do something to give expression to her feelings. The ointment was nothing; she was pouring out her heart at Jesus' feet.

The Gospel narratives, in showing how the act of Mary was understood and misunderstood by those who

witnessed it, invite us to consider the principles on which actions can be or ought to be judged.

1. The standard which first occurs to every one is that of duty or law. The right action is one that is enjoined upon us by the law, one which an external rule makes obligatory, and which we dare not neglect. It is obvious that this is a standard of which we can here make no use at all. There was no law which required Mary to act as she did, and no one could say that a law had been broken or that duty had been neglected even though the anointing at Bethany had never taken place.

2. But there is another standard by which we may judge of actions—not the standard of duty, but that of utility. We may think not of what it is obligatory upon us to do, but of what it is sensible, reasonable, profitable for us to do. This was the standard which was applied by some of those who were present on the occasion, and particularly by Judas. To them the anointing was waste. It was the more reprehensible because there were so many better things which might have been done at the same cost. "It might have been sold for more than three hundred pence and given to the poor." We all feel that this utilitarian estimate of Mary's action is, to say the least, unsympathetic : it is no use asking what is the good of such and such an action if the actor is quite indifferent about the good of it in your sense of the term. You cannot convict him of any wrong by showing that there is no profit in what he has done, unless he did it for such profit, or unless such profit is the only legitimate end of action. What the disciples did when they exclaimed, why was this waste of the ointment

made? was really to interpret through the senses an action which proceeded from the soul, and could only disclose its meaning to the soul. Perhaps they were ashamed the moment the word "waste" had passed their lips, and tried to cover their confusion by the suggestion that it might have been given to the poor: this is no unusual experience. Anyhow we must remember they were poor men, and that to squander in one impulsive instant, for no visible object, a whole year's wages of a working man, might well put them out of their reckoning for the moment. But we must take care also not to share their mistake. To waste, in the proper sense of the term, no one could be more opposed than Jesus. It is He who says, "Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost". But generosity is not waste. The affections need to be nourished, and they are only nourished by the kind of giving which looks for no return. They need to be nourished even in the interest of the poor, and it is no genuine care for the poor which would check their spontaneous, impulsive, even exuberant action. The hope of the poor lies in the kindness and generosity of human hearts, and kindness and generosity are fostered not by considerations of what is sensible, but by kind and generous deeds. It was Mary who wasted the ointment and Judas who put forward the case of the poor: but who will believe that Judas was a better friend to the poor than Mary? There is, of course, such a thing as senseless extravagance, and even in the generosity of love there may be a trace of vanity—a man may be proud of himself in the gift he bestows on his wife; but the true wealth of the world lies in generous feeling, and there is no wisdom, nor economy,

nor care for the poor, in suppressing the instinctive movements of the heart. The soul is not to be judged and snubbed by the senses; it has laws of its own of which the senses know nothing, and they are signally illustrated in this act.

3. This brings us to the third standard by which actions may be interpreted—not duty, or utility, but love. Jesus undertakes the defence of the woman against those who misunderstood or complained of her. "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying." If we observe the main points in this defence we shall see the characteristics of the action which so deeply moved Jesus that He conferred on it an immortality of fame. "Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

There are three points in the defence of Mary by Jesus which seem to call for particular attention.

(*a*) In describing what she has done as "a good work," He judges not by the senses, but by the soul. He does not mean that it was legally binding, or that it was economically sensible, but that it has the charm of moral originality and inspiration on it, like the works of God. The right which is thus inspired is not only right, but lovely, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. The house was filled with the odour of the ointment, and the fragrance of this surpassingly beautiful deed has never faded from the Church. It was grateful to

Christ as the unsought unbidden act of a child's love is dear to the mother—as an unexpected gift of the bridegroom, with no motive but love, is dear to the bride—as everything into which the heart pours its passion is dear to those on whom it is bestowed, in proportion as they are worthy of it. The motive of love, and the originality and spontaneity which accompany this motive, must characterize all actions which win the commendation of Jesus. The right must not have sunk in them into a tradition. It must not have been degraded into the observance of a statute. It must not be confounded with the sensible or the expedient which can be justified on utilitarian grounds. If it is to be recognized by Jesus as Divinely right it must be incalculable, spontaneous, creative in its originality, a new revelation of what the good can be. It is only then that Jesus can say of it emphatically, as He did of Mary's act of devotion, "a good work".

(*b*) The second important point in the defence of Mary by Jesus is contained in the allusion to His death. "Me ye have not always . . . she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying." I have said already that we hardly know how far the company present at the Supper had entered into Jesus' anticipations of the end. It is a fair inference from these words that Mary had entered into them more deeply than the others. Even if she had no definite idea of His burial in her mind—and it is unlikely that she had—she may quite well have divined more clearly than others what was absorbing the mind of Jesus; she may have felt, as they did not, that they were not to have Him with them long. It was out of some such

sympathy with Jesus, deep and passionate though obscure, that she acted; and Jesus, we might almost say, only gave it clearness and took it at its real value when He said, "She hath done it for My burial". Now this kind of sympathy, which feels what it cannot see, and which gives a depth and scope to action beyond what the actor himself can grasp at the moment, is also essential to "a good work". Nothing is supremely good that we understand beforehand all round and through and through. There must be something operative in it which goes beyond us; motives of which we cannot give a full and clear account, but which connect us somehow with God. It is insensibility to such larger if less-defined realities which makes conduct small and disappointing, and heaps up legacies of remorse. What a solemn shadow it would cast upon the company at Bethany to realize that with death so close at hand they should grudge love the opportunity of showing itself without counting the cost! Even the miserly soul becomes generous in such a case. The most grasping man does not grudge anything to make his love real and dear to the wife or the child that is slipping from his grasp. He does not know what good it can do, but he must do it. But in all that company at Bethany the one who was in deepest sympathy with the Master was the one whom the rest could not understand: an unhappy memory for them! Let us note it, as a further mark of what is divinely good, that it must be inspired by a sensitive sympathy with Jesus, a sympathy which enables us to divine His mind even when it is not formally expressed.

(*c*) The third point in the defence is contained in

the words, "She hath done what she could". Unfortunately this expression is capable of being misunderstood, and has indeed been widely understood in a sense exactly the opposite of that which it was intended to bear. In our modern idiom, "she hath done what she could" is almost as much apologetic as eulogistic. The undertone is, "It was not much, of course, but what more could one expect? There is no room for reproach or censure." This, I say, is precisely the reverse of what the words mean. The disciples did not reproach the woman for doing so little, but for doing so much; and Jesus justified her, not by reducing her act to smaller proportions, but by revealing it in all its depth and height, and showing that it was greater than she herself knew. The only close analogy to it which I can recall in Scripture is the story told in 2 Samuel chapter xxiii. "And David longed and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" The true sense of the words of Jesus is seen if we apply them to the three mighty men and their heroic achievement. *They* did what they could. They saw the opportunity for showing their devotion to their king, for doing him the smallest service at the most tremendous hazard; they saw it and seized it. They rose to the occasion, and they rose at the same

instant to the height of their valour and their fame. So did Mary of Bethany. She responded to the mood of Jesus with the same instinctive loyalty with which the mighty men responded to the longing of David; she saw what the moment required, and was equal to it; she met a heart over which the shadow of death was darkening with an uncalculating outburst of love which was inexpressibly grateful to Jesus. But while the magnanimous King of Israel dared not accept the gift of his mighty men, and felt that devotion like theirs was too much for any human being, and that he must pour out the water they had brought at the hazard of their lives as an offering *to the Lord*—a proof that with David and his heroes it was like master like man—Jesus welcomes the devotion of Mary, and rewards it with undying fame. He does not excuse, he glorifies her when he says, "She has done what she could."

This, then, is another mark of what Jesus means by "a good work": it is a work signalized by generosity, abandonment, uncalculating devotion, and that on an occasion on which others see no call for anything unusual. There is indeed an appeal in the circumstances of the case, but it is too subtle for the unsympathetic to feel it, and too searching for the ungenerous to respond to it. They never become aware of the chances they lose of doing such good works and winning Christ's praise. They are apt to criticize devotion, as the sensible people at Bethany criticized Mary, but such criticism is only a proof that the moral intelligence and the moral nature are alike undeveloped. "Want of tenderness is want of parts."

I shall conclude with two observations on this story,

of a more general purport. The first is that the act of Mary illustrates the Gospel. It does so in a way so unmistakable that Jesus Himself secures it its place in the Gospel for ever. It is told for a memorial of Mary, but it is told also to reveal Jesus. It is a characteristic page in His life, exhibiting at once His conception of what is morally lovely, and His power to evoke the reality of it in the souls of others. Here we see the very spirit of Jesus. He is one who gives without calculating. When do we most feel inclined to say, "To what purpose is this waste?" Is it not when we look at His life and death—at the tears He shed over the impenitent, at the patience with which He sought those who refused to be found, at the love He lavished on those who would not love Him in return? Is this sensible? No, but it is Divine. It cannot be justified on prudential or utilitarian grounds, but it does not need to be justified to love. Yet even Christian theologians have argued for a limited atonement on the ground that upon any other theory the love of Christ was "wasted"—thrown away for nothing. As if it were not the very tragedy of being lost that some men can perish in a world in which Christ died for all. The utmost devotion of which human souls are capable is only the reflex of that love with which He gave Himself a ransom for us, and nothing less than the utmost devotion on our part bears any proportion to that which has been demonstrated by Him.

The second observation is this: the act of Mary judges those who judge it. It provokes criticism, but the criticism recoils. It is carped at by the selfish, but the selfish are always hypocrites: they always have reasons on their side, and they always have love—

which is the supreme moral reason—against them. It is not a bad way to test what we are, to ask whether we have ever done an impulsive, enthusiastic, extravagant thing in love. Have you ever done any such thing for your mother or your wife, for your church or your city, for a stranger or a friend? If so, it is a good omen. But show me the man who has never in a moment of high feeling spent what he could not justify on economical grounds, and I will show you a man not fit for the kingdom of God. "Magnanimity owes prudence no account of its motives." Love is not bound to justify itself to the utilitarian; but the utilitarian will one day have to plead his cause at the bar of love, and will find that he has none. Immortality, according to Scripture, does not belong to the economists and the sensible men, but to the martyrs; not to those whose aim is to save their lives, but to those who are willing to spend and be spent to the utmost for a cause greater than life itself. It is in them that Jesus sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

# PROPITIATION.[1]

"He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."—1 JOHN II. 2.

WITHIN the last twelve months foreign missions have been more talked about in the Church than at any time I can remember. The appeals made in connexion with them have been frequent and importunate. The cause has been pleaded with every kind of argument. The actual condition of the non-Christian world has been presented to us with a fullness and distinctness once impossible: we have been shown in all its aspects what the life is which is waiting for the Gospel. In many parts of the globe the critical nature of the situation has been emphasized. Opportunities, we have been told, are passing—will within five years or ten years have passed—never to return. In the Far East, where great nations are awaking and coming to the consciousness of their powers, it is now or never for the Gospel. It is now or never in Africa, where every Moslem is a missionary and where Islam is advancing with giant strides. Missions have had much to do with the new movements in India and China, but what a frightful prospect it would open up if the vast populations of Asia should master the resources of Christian civilization and be left with none but pagan impulses to direct

[1] Preached at the annual meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society, April, 1911.

them. The urgency of the need and the vastness of the opportunity have alike been pressed on the Church, and we have not wanted those who in view of both have talked to us of missions as a "business proposition," and have told us how, as men of business, we must address ourselves to the organizing and financing of the business if it is to be made a business success. And what is the result of this unexampled activity in pleading the mission cause? So far as I can see, it is neither here nor there. An immense proportion of the people in our churches care little about the matter. There is no sensible increase either of contributions or of gifted men. There are no signs of expansion, elasticity, or fresh ardour.

Now why should this be? Some appeals, I can hardly doubt, are wrecked on the sober, not to say the sceptical common sense of those who hear them. Many people cannot help distrusting the diagnoses of vast situations like those presented in India and China. They do not believe that anybody can read them with authority, and when they are told of the consequences that will inevitably follow if something is not done within five years or ten years, they are not much impressed. They have a latent consciousness that all human affairs are in the hands of God, and that though He honours us to be His fellow-workers, it is a mistake to suppose that the vast movement depends, in the way implied in such appeals, upon us. Many people also have something in their minds which reacts against the idea that we can plan, organize, and carry out the evangelization of the world. They do not really believe that the thing is to be done that way. They get tired of military metaphors—about sending rein-

forcements here and occupying strategic points there. They cannot help remembering words of Jesus about the kingdom of God—words in which it is compared to a seed growing secretly, or to leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole is leavened—and they cannot get over the feeling that these words must apply (in a way which many appeals overlook) to the coming of the kingdom of God even in India and China. Further, there is a sense of proportion in the human mind which is apt to protest when even a great cause is put out of focus. There are many people in our churches whose minds and hands are pretty full. They are in a situation which taxes all their faculties. Their families, their business, their rents and rates, their duties religious and political to the society in which they live, are real, insistent, and absorbing; and while they would not disclaim responsibility for foreign missions, they are impatient when their other responsibilities seem to be minimized in pleading the mission cause. They can make missions to the heathen a real but not a preponderating care. To ask them to make missions their primary concern seems to them almost as unreal as to ask them to learn Hindustani or Chinese. It is impossible, not because they care nothing for the Chinese or the Hindus, but because the bulk of their intellectual and moral energies is pre-engaged, and pre-engaged in what they consider imperative and entirely right ways.

I have said these things, which to some may appear chilling or out of place, only because I do not wish to be thought oblivious of them. But when all such allowances have been made, there ought to be more missionary interest in our churches than is actually

found, and the fault lies in the last resort not in the nature of the appeals which are made for missions, but in the minds to which they are addressed. "Some people," I once heard a distinguished missionary say, "do not believe in missions. They have no right to believe in missions: they do not believe in Christ." This goes to the root of the matter. It is not interest in missions that we want in our churches at this moment, but interest in the Gospel. Apart from a new interest in the Gospel, a revival of evangelical faith in Christ as the Redeemer, I believe we shall look in vain for a response to missionary appeals. But there is something in the Gospel itself, something especially in that presentation of it which we have in the text, which immediately creates missionary interest, because it has no proper correlative but the universe. Again and again we have it echoed in St. John. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin *of the world.*" "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of *every kindred and tongue and people and nation.*" "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for *the whole world.*" It is as though one might conceive Christ in *some* character or aspect which limited His significance, but once He is seen in the character of a propitiation, as a lamb bearing and bearing away sin, all limitations are removed. The only correlative of such a Christ is the whole world, and nothing gives us such a wonderful impression of what Christ was to His immediate followers as that they actually saw in Him as He died upon the cross a goodness that outweighed not only their sin but all sin, and could say God was in Christ reconciling the *world* to Himself. This is the consciousness

out of which the missionary impulse springs. This was what made Paul cry, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise". If there is little missionary interest in the churches, depend upon it, the reason is that there is little evangelic interest. The wonder of that redeeming revelation that made the first disciples Apostles has faded away, and we must revive it by standing where the Apostles stood, and seeing Christ in the awful and glorious light in which they saw Him, if new life is to enter into missionary work.

We are all familiar with the aversion to the ideas of sin and of propitiation. In a sense, they stand and fall together. If there is no sin, there can be no propitiation. The one is just as real as the other. I am not going to speak to those who question the reality of sin —who explain and extenuate what was once so-called, who resolve it into the inevitable result of heredity and environment, for whom individual is lost in corporate responsibility, and who have never had the experience of a living soul standing with a bad conscience in the presence of the living God. The whole Gospel is meant for sinners—not for men as such, but for sinful men: an elementary truth too often overlooked. It is meant for people to whom the bad conscience is a responsibility they cannot escape, a chain they cannot break, a doom—and what doom could be heavier—never to be anything else than what they are. It is to men who in one degree or other know what sin is, that the Gospel is addressed. It is to them Christ comes from God, and He comes in the character of a Redeemer. He does not regard sin nor treat it as unreal. On the contrary, it is more real to Him than it is to us. He

enters more deeply than we can into all it means both for us and for God—He, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And because He does so, He is the propitiation for our sins.

When we think of the forgiveness of sins, there are only three things we can say. One is, that it is impossible. Things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be : not even God can reverse them. As the late Mr. Rathbone Greg put it, God is the only being who cannot forgive. A man who is more or less indifferent to moral interests may be indulgent to his neighbour who is no better than himself; but how can indulgence be looked for from One who is the inflexible guardian of right ? I am not going to argue against this. I believe it contains a recognition of the vital truth that God never condones sin. He never treats it as anything less or anything else than it is. If there should turn out, after all, to be such a thing as a Divine forgiveness of sins, we may be sure it will be such a forgiveness as carries the Divine condemnation and destruction of sin in the heart of it.

Another thing that may be said is, that forgiveness can be taken for granted. Of course God forgives. That is what God is for. His name was proclaimed to Moses, "The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." We can all presume upon that. I am not going to argue against this either. I believe it is an imperfect and in the last resort an impious way of recognizing the truth that salvation is of the Lord. "'Tis from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin," and they do begin.

The initiative in salvation must lie with God, and He actually takes the initiative. We can and do *depend* upon that. But we must not presume upon it. Often we are referred to the Old Testament for illustrations of the experience of forgiveness which are not (it is said) conditioned by anything in the nature of propitiation, yet for depth and height and gladness have never been surpassed. It may not be possible for us to tell through what experiences God mediated to psalmists and prophets in ancient times the assurance of His pardoning love to Israel, but one thing is certain: none of them ever took it for granted. To all of them it came as the wonder of wonders, the unsurpassable, all but incredible, revelation of the goodness of God. Listen to Moses: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin and have made them gods of gold; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." Is that the voice of a man who thinks that of course God must forgive? Or listen to the great prophet of the exile. He has caught the voice of God, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee"; and how does he respond? "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel." I ask again, is that the voice of a man who thinks forgiveness may be assumed? Take one example more, from Micah. "Who is a god like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" Does he take for-

giveness for granted, or does not the amazing revelation and experience of it lift his God above all gods? No! whatever the way in which their experience of forgiveness came to Old Testament men, it came as a marvel in which God was incomparably revealed, as an inspiration to passionate praise, not as a commonplace which called for no comment.

We might say antecedently to experience either of these things—forgiveness is impossible, or forgiveness may be taken for granted—and we have allowed for the truth and falsehood of both; but what the New Testament says is that God Himself loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for sins, and that in Him we have our redemption, through His blood, even the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. There is something in this which we could never have anticipated. Forgiveness is not impossible, nor is it a matter of course; it is a miracle. As the New Testament holds it out to sinful men, it is the supreme achievement of God in Christ; His costliest, His unspeakable gift. To receive it is an experience as wonderful in its kind as to achieve it or to bestow it; there is a passion in being pardoned corresponding to the passion of Jesus when He gave His life a ransom for men. This is what is fundamental in the Christian religion, and it is this we must recover in it if we would revive its original expansive power.

Many people speak of the forgiveness of sins who have no idea of what forgiveness means in the New Testament, and no idea, either, of the ways in which the reality of sin is demonstrated there. The one condition of forgiveness which they understand is repentance on the part of the sinner—as though the reality

of sin were exhausted in what it is to him. But its reality is not exhausted so, even if we assume, what is never the case, that the repentance is adequate to the offence. Sin is real in the universe, beyond the sinner's control. It is real to God; and before it can be forgiven by Him—or rather in the very act in which it is forgiven, as part of the very process of forgiving—*His* sense of its reality must be declared. This is what is done in the propitiation, and it is in proportion as we appreciate this that the Divine forgiveness appears an unspeakable gift. I believe the reason why we sometimes have difficulty with this connexion of ideas is that we are too familiar with forgiving ourselves, and too apt to assume that this is the same as being forgiven. Often in hearing or reading arguments against propitiation—especially those based on human analogies—I have wondered whether those who used them had ever had the experience of being truly forgiven for a real wrong by a fellow creature. Take the case of that relation in which human love is most intense, and at the same time most ethical—most remote from the elemental instinct with which even the dumb creatures cling to their young—the relation of husband and wife. A man may sin in this relation—I do not mean at all in the gross way of violating his marriage vow—but in a way that wounds his wife's love. He may do something by which he falls in her opinion, compels her to be ashamed of him instead of proud of him; he may forfeit the confidence she once had in him, and in proportion to the fineness and nobility of her nature hurt her more than he can comprehend. And what then? Possibly what happens in such a case is that there is no reconciliation, but that after a

while the offender begins to forgive himself. He has been mortified, ashamed, and humiliated as well as his wife, and it is mainly of himself that he thinks. He sees no more that is to be made by indulging such feelings longer. He assumes that his wife as a reasonable being will at last let bygones be bygones; and in consideration of the fact that he admits he has behaved badly, he expects her to be willing to begin again, and to go on as if nothing had happened. This is what often takes place in human relations, and unhappily it is often the only analogy which experience supplies for interpreting our relation to God. But sometimes what takes place is quite different, far more wonderful, far more Divine. There is such an experience as a real reconciliation, in which the offender does not forgive himself but is forgiven. And what is the peculiarity of this experience, by which it is differentiated from the other? It is this: the centre of moral interest is transferred at once from the offender to the offended. The centre of the passion by which sin is overcome is seen to be not in the sinner, however deep and pure his repentance may be, but in the purer and diviner spirit which has borne his sin and is forgiving it. If this is a true analogy, can anyone think forgiveness is easy, a thing that needs no explanation, and to which the idea of propitiation is irrelevant or even abhorrent? I can believe that it is possible for love to forgive anything—for the love of a wife to pardon things in her husband that broke her pride, her hope, and her trust in him; but I can believe also, or rather I cannot but believe, that just in proportion to the purity and divineness of her nature, must that forgiveness come out of an agony in which

it would not be amazing if she suddenly fell down dead. There is all this difference between forgiving oneself, which is so easy, so common, and so degrading; and being forgiven by a love which has borne our sins, which is so tragic, so subduing, so regenerating. Real forgiveness, forgiveness by another whom we have wronged, and in whom there is a love, which forgiveness reveals, able at once to bear the wrong and to inspire the penitence through which we can rise above it, is always tragic; and it is tragic on both sides—to him who has borne the sin which he forgives, and to him who stoops with a penitent heart to be forgiven. What the propitiation stands for is the divine side of this tragedy. It is tragic for God to forgive—a solemn and awful experience, if we may put it so, for Him; just as to be forgiven is tragic—a solemn and awful experience for us. This is the truth —and of its truth I have no more doubt than I have of my own existence—which underlies all the New Testament teaching about propitiation. To evade it, or to let it fall into the background, is not to drop a Jewish misconception which the Christian spirit has outgrown. It is to pluck the heart out of the Christian religion. It is to stifle praise in the birth, and cut devotion at the root.

The great distinction between the Old Testament and the New, in what they reveal about forgiveness, lies just here: the New Testament has a perception, which was as yet impossible to the Old, of the cost at which forgiveness comes to men. The Old Testament felt that it was wonderful, but the New Testament can say that it is as wonderful as the Passion of Jesus. He died for our sins. In Him we have our redemption

through His blood. We are justified freely by God's grace—the Old Testament knew that; but in the New Testament they can add, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation, through faith, in His blood. That is the ultimate difference of the dispensations, the last and highest stage of revelation in the new. But on this ultimate difference others are dependent, and among these the conspicuous difference with which we are concerned to-day, that while the Old Testament religion was that of a nation, the New Testament religion is destined for the human race. Get to the heart of it and its universal scope cannot be missed. The propitiation is so absolute, so divine, that it draws everything within its range. If we feel what it is, we feel that it is not for our sins only, but also for the whole world.

The motives to mission work—in other words, to preaching the Gospel—can never be found in a command as such. We read the command of Jesus in the Gospel, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," and we know by experience that for multitudes it does not constitute a motive at all. They are quite well aware of it, but they quite easily ignore it. It only acts as a motive in those who have themselves been won by Christ, who realize what an unspeakable gift God has given us in His Son, and who feel spontaneously the impulse to impart it. There may be degrees in this realization, but it is most keen and vital—it operates most potently as a motive for preaching the Gospel—in those who have apprehended Christ in His character as a propitiation. In comparison with the Christianity which has this grasp on the heart of the New Testament revelation every other is

anæmic ; it is the passion of Jesus the Redeemer which alone evokes a responsive passion in sinful hearts. It is this which opens men's mouths in testimony meetings ; it is this which raises up evangelists ; it is this and nothing else which will send them for the name of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth. And if even the command of Jesus, simply as a command, is ineffective, much more so are what may be called the secondary motives to missions. Our science, our civilization, our administration of justice, our industry—all these may be valuable enough, and it might be very advantageous to introduce them into countries we could name ; but the Christian Church does not exist to be the agent or the forerunner of external fashions of life which it has seen come into being and which it will probably see pass away. It lives for and by the things which are spiritual and eternal. In Jesus Christ the righteous, the propitiation for sins, it is the possessor of something inexpressibly good—something so good, and for which it feels so deeply indebted and so boundlessly grateful to God—that it cannot keep silence nor withhold it from any man. There are Gospels with which we would not go very far. They are so poor that we should hardly like to expose them to anyone, let alone to all the world. But if Christ the propitiation has been revealed to us as the power of God to save, then we have something in our hearts that lifts us above the need of commands and makes secondary motives unreal. The only motives worth considering in this region are the irresistible motives. We get nothing until we get men who say, "We cannot but speak. Necessity is laid upon us. We are debtors. Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God ; or

whether we be sober, it is for your cause ; for the love of Christ constraineth us. Having therefore obtained help of God I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great." I repeat, what we want is not missionaries, in the narrower sense, but evangelists—not a new interest in the non-Christian world, but a new interest in the Gospel—not men who want to preach to the heathen, but men who cannot but preach where they are. That is the stock from which alone the missionary force can be recruited—the men and women in whom all emotions and motives are swallowed up in the sense of what they owe to the Redeemer. Let us pray and preach for the multiplication of such men, if we would help the mission cause. Redeemed and devoted lives will solve all our problems, and nothing less will touch them. The appeals which have been made so long in vain will not be vain when the old doxology breaks again irresistibly and spontaneously from the Church's lips—Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. That is the voice of those who know instinctively that Christ is the heir of the world. It is of Him and of His Church that they think when they sing that ancient Psalm of the kingdom and its King. "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains ; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon : and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever ; His name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in Him ; all nations shall call Him blessed." Amen.

## THE VOICE OF JESUS.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."—MATTHEW XI. 28-30.

THERE is a benediction in the very sound of these words, of which few that have heard them are quite unconscious, and it becomes the more striking when we observe the setting in which they are placed by the evangelist. Up to the preceding chapter, the story of Jesus' life as a teacher and healer seems to have been one of unbroken success; the multitudes thronged around Him, and the work so grew upon His hands that He was obliged to share it with the Twelve, and to send them out to preach and heal in His name. But with the eleventh chapter a turning point is reached, and now almost every incident in the life of Jesus, over a considerable period, might be headed *Offence*. In the opening of the chapter His forerunner John is presented to us as in doubt about His Messiahship. "Art thou He that should come, or are we to look for another?" Then we see Jesus comparing His contemporaries—the generation which would not listen either to Himself or His forerunner—to wilful children, who would not play at any kind of game their companions proposed; neither a wed-

ding nor a funeral would please them; they would not be in earnest with God whether He came in the austerity of the Baptist or the geniality of the Son of Man. In what immediately follows we hear Him pronounce woes on the cities which had seen all His mighty works and yet had not repented, and face the disconcerting fact that all the better classes, as we should say now, were against Him. The wise and prudent could see nothing in His message. Yet while thus repelled on every hand Jesus is not shaken inwardly. His trust in the Father and in His guidance remains: "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight". His confidence that He is empowered for His work, and can do for men all that they need to have done, remains: "All things have been delivered unto Me by My Father . . . no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him". And above all, His love remains. It is against this background of offence and disappointment that He stretches out His hands again and cries: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

1. The people addressed were in the first instance those whose religion had become a burden to them. It is remarkable, indeed, that this is one of the chief connexions in which the terms "burden" and "yoke" are employed in the New Testament. "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne upon men's shoulders": so said Jesus of the religious teachers of His day. "Ye are putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear": so said Peter at a later day to their successors in the Christian Church. Religion had become

for multitudes an affair of endless commandments and prohibitions; its statutes—and it was all statutes—were numbered by hundreds; they were to be obeyed because there they were, the traditions of the elders. As Jesus looked round Him, He saw men crushed, bent and tottering under this traditional and statutory religion—weary with their efforts to do justice to it, yet never getting one step nearer God, nor finding rest and liberty within. It is to such He cries, "Come unto Me. I have the secret of what you are looking for. I can initiate you into the true religion, the obedience which is not imposed but inspired; and there you will find rest for your souls."

Are there not still those whose burden is that of a degenerate religion? True religion, the life of God in the soul of man, is not a burden, but the very reverse. It is not something that we carry; it is properly something which sustains us. But how many people there are whose religion is their chief trouble. Carlyle speaks mockingly of governments for which religion only exists in the shape of the religious question or the religious difficulty. But it is not only governments of which we may say this. There are plenty of men and women who get nothing out of their religion; it troubles, perplexes, oppresses them; it is something they do not know what to do with. And the reason of this is always the same. Human traditions have gathered round the religion and become identified with it: it means a great mass of things that we are to believe, because others have believed them, or that we are to continue to do because others have done them. But times change, and minds change, and these traditions become an ever more intolerable burden. We

do not know how to adjust the traditional beliefs to other things which we know to be true. We cannot feel that there is anything morally effective in the traditional modes of behaviour—anything to which conscience consents spontaneously, and which tells upon the world as real goodness would. The whole thing becomes a burden and a perplexity—a mass of questions we do not know how to answer, of conventional ways of being good and of doing good from which we cannot help fearing that the virtue has departed. We are weakened, depressed, overborne by our religion, not uplifted and inspired. What are we to say to souls in such a case? Jesus says, "Come unto me". What you need is not religion—in the shape that time and human traditions have given to it—but Christ. It is not other people's pieties, or creeds, or sacred customs, but Christ. God does not wish us to have the religion of our ancestors, but to have religion of our own, and such religion is kindled in our souls when we drop religion as it is imposed by men, and come to Him. This is no doctrine of mere rebellion or religious anarchy; there is no fear of rebellion or anarchy when we put on the yoke of Jesus.

But how do we come to Jesus? There is no general answer to this question; the peculiarity and the beauty of coming to a person is that every one may do it in a way of his own. It is not like learning a catechism, or mastering a science, where there is the same routine for every one; it is like forming a friendship, or falling in love. Every life crosses that of Jesus at its own angle, and in all true religion there is an original experience, something which is our very own. No one can tell how slight it may be to begin with.

Even in human relations we may owe all the happiness of which we are capable, or all the misery—all the best we can rise to, or all the worst to which we can sink—to what seem very insignificant things; to a look, an attitude, a gesture, the tone of a voice, a word so trifling that no one was aware of it but ourselves. There is the same incalculable incommensurable element in all real contact of the soul with Jesus. The one certainty in every case is that we come to Jesus in some kind of obedience, in an act rather than a belief, or in a belief which has no adequate expression except in act. *Take My yoke upon you.* No intellectual difficulties are ever supposed in the Gospel, for there are no intellectual requirements. But there is always something to *do*, or to *bear*. What it is, we must find out for ourselves in Jesus' presence; but as we do it, the true religion will rise up within us, assured, emancipating, full of a deep peace and joy. Though the idea of a yoke is irksome, Jesus says, "My yoke is easy". This is not because His standard is lower than that of conventional religion; on the contrary, there is none so high. But in His company it is the heights which attract. "My feet always move quicker of themselves when I catch sight of the hills." As he breathes His own spirit into us, obedience is not a crushing burden that we bear; it is the uprising in us of gratitude and devotion in which our souls find rest.

2. If a degenerate religion is the burden of some, that of others is that they have no religion at all. Their life is empty and futile; the one word of Scripture they thoroughly understand is "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity". Life is a burden to them because there

is nothing in it. It has no chief end, no satisfying result, no fruit that abides. Day by day it goes on, and year by year, always heavier and heavier as its emptiness is realized. How many people there are who are burdened by this vain life which has no inner law, no necessity and no freedom of its own. How many there are who with a sense of slavery do what other people do, and sometimes wish they had never been born. Perhaps they are recruited in part from those who have rebelled against conventional religion, but have not got past the stage of mere rebellion. But more commonly they represent what is another great tradition in human life—the tradition of self-will. Promising as it seems at first, all experience goes to show that there is nothing so fatiguing and oppressive. It never gives rest to the soul.

> Me this unchartered freedom tires ;
> I feel the weight of chance desires :
> My hopes no more must change their name :
> I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Or in a wilder strain :—

> He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
> And crowned his hair with flowers ;
> No easier nor no quicker passed
> The impracticable hours.

Has Jesus anything to say to those who are sighing under this burden? Yes, even to those who have lived this empty, disappointing life, and who are crushed beneath its futility, He cries, "Come unto me." Empty and worthless as it is, this life may still be redeemed ; nay, it may be filled unto all the fullness of God. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me". Do one single thing which Jesus commands ; do

rather one single thing which His example inspires —for the yoke is one which He bears rather than imposes—and you will be let into the secret. Mark Pattison said that one of the things which impressed him in his work as a teacher was the smallness of the seed from which a complete intellectual life might spring. Once get the living mind into contact with living reality, and no matter how insignificant the point of contact might appear, a process was set up which would not cease till the mind had gathered all things into itself. It is the same in the spiritual world. The emptiest life only needs to establish communication with Jesus by putting on His yoke to be launched on a career of boundless satisfaction and peace.

3. There is a burden commoner still than that of a degenerate religion or an empty life—the burden of a bad conscience. There is no weight so crushing as that of the invisible chain which binds a man to his past, and makes it impossible for him to be anything but what he is. Can Jesus do anything for this burden? Can He lift the load of guilt with its crushing and disabling memories, and give relief to the soul?

There is nothing about which we can be more positive than this. The Gospels are full of illustrations of it, and they are confirmed by the whole history of the Church. Think of the woman in Simon's house, who washed His feet with tears and wiped them with the hair of her head, and to whom He said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace". Think of Peter, when the Lord turned and looked upon him, as he denied Him with oaths and curses. Think of the paralytic borne of four, on whom He wrought the comprehensive miracle of redemption: "Courage, child, thy sins are

forgiven thee; arise, take up thy bed and walk". In cases like these we see the burden falling, the chain breaking, peace welling up through the deepest penitence, joy and hope dawning in souls that had been sunk in despair. And it is such souls as much as any that are appealed to in the words of Jesus, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

What the man who is burdened with a bad conscience needs is the assurance that there is a love in God deeper and stronger than sin. Not a love which is indifferent to sin or makes light of it. Not a love to which the bad conscience, which is so tragically real to man, and so fatally powerful in his life, is a mere misapprehension to be ignored or brushed aside as insignificant. No, but a love to which sin, and its condemnation in conscience, and its deadly power, are all that they are to man, and more; a love which sees sin, which feels it, which is wounded by it, which condemns and repels it with an annihilating condemnation: yet holds fast to man through it all with Divine power to redeem, and to give final deliverance from it. This is what the man needs who is weighed down and broken and made impotent by a bad conscience, and this is what he finds when he comes to Jesus. The doctrine of the atonement is the doctrine of the cost at which such a wondrous revelation of love is made to sinful men: it is intended to make intelligible the method and the cost of forgiveness. We do not need to be astonished if what are called the intellectual difficulties of the Gospel culminate here, and if there is no doctrine which men are so prompt to criticize and to repudiate. In the nature of the case, if we try to

construct a doctrine of forgiveness at all, it must be a difficult doctrine; it has to focus in itself many great and superficially inconsistent ideas. All the attributes of God must be active in it, His inviolable holiness and His infinite love. All the aspects of human nature must have justice done them in it; its deep corruption, and its capacity for redemption. Not merely the relation of the sinner to God and to the moral order of the world has to be considered, but the solidarity of the sinner on one side and of Christ on the other with the whole human race. When we try to apprehend all these things at once—and these are by no means all that have to be considered—who will venture to say that He has done to all the justice to which they are entitled? Who will be astonished if the doctrine of atonement has sometimes been superficially and inadequately handled, if it has been misunderstood and misrepresented, if it has been preached in forms which rather challenged the criticism of the conscience than satisfied its deepest needs? But why trouble about the doctrine? Surely what conscience cries out for is not the explanation of forgiveness, but the experience of it; and for this we must come to Christ. The experience does not rest on the doctrine, but the doctrine on the experience. No doctrine can make us certain in our very souls that there is a love of God against which even our sin is powerless, but it is to give us that very certainty that Jesus cries, "Come unto Me". We cannot get it in the catechism. We cannot get it through any doctrine of the work of Christ. We can only get it in His company, because the thing itself, the love which bears sin and which holds fast

to man through it, is manifest in all its power and intensity in Him alone.

And if here again we ask *how* it is that He imparts this certainty to those who come to Him—how He creates in sinful souls the assurance of a pardoning and restoring love in God which gives the victory over sin—we can only say again that the ways are too manifold and too wonderful to trace. Sometimes the assurance is born within us as we hear Him proclaim forgiveness to the paralytic or to that passionate penitent who wet His feet with tears. Sometimes it dawns upon us as we see Him receive sinners and eat with them. Is not that a very sacrament of pardon, that fellowship of the sinless one with the sinful, in which they are made to feel what their sin is, and yet are not driven away, but have access to the Holy One? Is not that, as it were, forgiveness incarnate, a pledge of it that no one can misunderstand? Sometimes again the certainty shines out for us from the gracious parables of Jesus—from the story of the two debtors who had nothing to pay, but obtained a free discharge; or more movingly from the story of the prodigal son, whose father saw him a long way off, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. We know, as Jesus speaks, who that father is, or rather whom he stands for; the pardoning love which welcomes the penitent prodigal is that of the heavenly Father welcoming His lost children home. And there are still more wonderful things than these in the Gospels which bring the Divine love near to us in Jesus. With what solemn yet reviving power the words sometimes fall upon the heart, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered

unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many!" To give His life a ransom for many: here we have something connected with sin, and not disproportioned to it—something deeper, more wonderful, more powerful than sin—something that when we see in it the key to the whole life of Jesus makes such a pardoning love as our sins require credible, real, present, overpowering. And as we read on in the story everything illumines and confirms it. Who can doubt that there is forgiveness with God when He hears Jesus say at the Supper, "This is My blood of the covenant, shed for many, unto remission of sins"? or when He sees Him, as He passes through the council hall, turn and look upon Peter? or as He listens to His last prayer for others, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? or to His last promise to the dying thief, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise"? Above all, who can doubt it when He comes back from death, and, standing in the midst of the very men who had all forsaken Him and fled, says, "Peace be unto you"? No one can take in all this and be in doubt as to whether there is forgiveness with God. We know, if we have come to Jesus, that there *is* forgiveness—not forgiveness lightly won or lightly to be assumed, not forgiveness easily to be understood or explained; but forgiveness with all the reality and passion in it of His life and death, forgiveness as mysterious and profound as all that is most tragic in the experience of Jesus, forgiveness that has plumbed the depths of sin and is able to save to the uttermost. We may never be able to explain it to the full, or to fashion it into a clear and consistent doctrine —indeed we never shall be able; it is beyond all hope of telling wonderful. But we can have the clearest

and surest experience of it, nevertheless, and that is better than any doctrine. Bring the burden of your bad conscience to Jesus. Open your heart to Him. Submit to His discipline. Keep in His company, listen to His words, learn what He is, come under the power of His life and death and resurrection, and He will give you that assurance and experience of a Divine forgiveness which will revive and recreate your soul.

4. Finally, the invitation of Jesus is addressed to those whose burden is of a less definite description—the burden of life itself with its apparently inevitable cares. Life is a conflict, and we have no choice but to face it; but how many there are who are wearied in it with responsibilities which are too heavy for them to bear. Men feel this even when they are successful: they are wearied with the greatness of their way. They feel it when they fail, and when greater effort is demanded of them while their strength is becoming less. Yet in both cases alike it may easily be that there is some false conception of life in the mind—some convention assumed to be authoritative—which in the presence of Jesus would lose its power. Many of our burdens are in this way of our own making. We measure life by an unreal standard. The things we are so keen about are not, after all, the things that matter. The victories and defeats that so elate or so depress us, and in any case so absorb and exhaust us, ought not to touch so deeply the spirit of man. Winners or losers in the conflict, we have all alike something to be ashamed of, and it comes home to us as the word of Jesus falls upon our ears, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and I will give you rest". Jesus knows the secret of life and teaches it. He gives rest by showing us what true life is, and enabling us to enter into it by taking His yoke

upon us. It does not consist in the abundance of the things which we possess, though to increase their possessions seems to be the most universal desire of living men. It does not consist in the distinctions we strive for—in the attainment of commercial or social or intellectual or political ambitions. To all these things Jesus was indifferent, yet He had the life which is life indeed. He had it through all the conflicts of earth, and through all its excitements; he had it through temptation, disappointment, suffering, poverty, death itself. That true life consists in the knowledge of God as Father, in the conviction of His fatherly love, in the consciousness that we are called to be His children, in the liberty of obedience to His will. All this Jesus can teach; He can initiate us into it by His word and life and spirit. He Himself is meek and lowly in heart, clean of earth's ambitions and its strifes; and as we enter into His school, putting on His yoke and learning of Him, His own peace comes to us, the peace of God which passes understanding, and keeps our thoughts and hearts in Him.

It is not possible to say on this text what should be said, or even what one would like to say. All our thoughts and words about it are far beneath its unspeakable grace and truth. Let us listen to it again, as from the lips of our Saviour, ere we close. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

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